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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A LEARNING SUPPORT TEACHER?

A life-history investigation of ten learning
support teachers in the east-coast of Ireland.

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M7162702

Doctor of Education (EdD)

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Abstract

There has been a rapid expansion of the learning support (LS) teaching service in Ireland since 1999 with approximately one in fifteen primary-school teachers currently working as learning support teachers (LSTs). Although there is a small body of quantitative research on LS teaching, there are no qualitative studies on LSTs themselves. This gap in the research is unfortunate because of the importance of studying teachers' lives and perspectives as a key to understanding teaching, a now well-established position in biographical research on education.

Using life-history interviews within a social constructivist paradigm, this study investigates the identity and work practices of ten LSTs in primary schools in the east-coast of Ireland. The study is based on the assumption that valuable insights into the work and identity of LSTs can be gained by examining their views and beliefs and the discourses through which they understand themselves and their work. A combination of grounded theory and discourse analysis is used to examine the language they use to construct themselves as LSTs and the discourse of LS teaching.

The evidence from the study shows that there is a recognisable way of using language and engaging in specific practices that can be described as a discourse of LS teaching. The LSTs are both constructors of and constructed by the discourse of LS teaching. Their accounts show that they perceived themselves, and believed others perceived them to be, different from mainstream class-teachers. Using the overarching concept of 'difference', three themes were distilled from the LSTs' accounts and used to analyse the data: their craft knowledge, the teaching of reading and parenthood. Their accounts display a potent union of theory and practice which was guided by their professional craft knowledge. They presented themselves as expert teachers of reading, comfortably embracing different models, thereby displaying their multiple positions and the complexity of the reading process. Drawing on their experiences of parenthood they constructed an identity for themselves as teacher-parents and parent-teachers.

The findings have implications for the provision of in-service and professional development for LSTs. If, as their accounts suggest, the discourse of LS teaching pushes LSTs and their pupils into marginalised positions, it is important to scrutinise this discourse so that the exclusionary assumptions underpinning it are explored. The insider perspectives gained from the life-history accounts offer worthwhile insights into the intuitive craft of teaching in general and the teaching of reading in particular.

Chapter One

Introduction

This is a life-history investigation of ten learning support teachers (LSTs)* in the east-coast of Ireland. The study is concerned with the identity of LSTs, most particularly, with how they articulate their own selfhood as LSTs. It asks the question ‘what does it mean to be a LST working in a primary school in the east-coast of Ireland?’ The study attempts to gain insight into how LSTs construct and perceive their own identity; how the practices of LS teaching, particularly the teaching of reading in which they engage, construct their identity and inversely, how their identity constructs the practices of LS teaching. It examines how the language they use helps constitute the sort of people they are as LSTs, as well as a discourse of LS teaching. This life-history investigation sheds light on the dual processes of discourse in the shaping of identity especially for members of professional groups with distinctive situated practices and orders of discourse. The teachers in this study are both constructors of and constructed by the discourse of LS teaching.

A key assumption underpinning this study is that valuable insights into the work and identity of LSTs can be gained by examining their own views and beliefs *and the discourses through which they understand their work and themselves*. Therefore the life-history, biographical interview is considered to be the most appropriate research methodology for the study. As Ball and Goodson (1985, p. 13) state, life-history

methods provide ways of opening up for study the sealed
boxes within which teachers work and survive.

According to Hansen-Nelson (1993), teachers’ thoughts and behaviour have only been taken into account within the research since the mid-eighties. For the purposes of this study, a working definition of life-history is taken from Day’s 1993, p. 221) description of teacher biography as

the formative experiences that have influenced the way
teachers think about their professional development.

By documenting the accounts of their work practices, ideas and constructions of teaching and learning, it is hoped to gain insights into what it means to be a LST as well as to contribute to the continuing development of life-history methodologies in the study of teachers' lives. As Hamilton (1993, p. 87) says

understanding why and how teachers think and practise in classrooms is essential to understanding teaching.

Teachers do not operate as autonomous, individual beings, divorced from the cultural contexts in which they work. Nor does teachers' knowledge reside in the individual teacher alone, but also in cultural, historical, material and social systems. Although teachers have unique, individual experiences, they are part of the cultural tradition of their profession (Laffitte, 1993; Yinger and Hendricks-Lee 1993). As Erben (1996, p. 172) argues "individual lives are articulations of the cultural". The beliefs, philosophies and assumptions of individual teachers provide a window onto the broader institutional, social, contextual and cultural influences of the time. LS teaching, like all teaching, is essentially a social endeavour. What is taught, how it is taught and learned, simultaneously reflect and create the society and culture of times current and past (Acker, 1987). This is a study of the LST in social context.

My interest in the study arises primarily from my work with practising LSTs, who are participating in year-long, post-graduate, in-service courses on LS teaching. These courses are provided, at the request of the Department of Education and Science, by the Department of Special Education in a national third level College of Education, where I work. Because my work includes acting as course-tutor for these courses, I have regular contact with a wide range of LSTs throughout the country. As course-tutor, I am particularly interested in developing and improving the LS courses so that they can best serve the needs of the course participants and ultimately, the pupils served by LSTs. In order to do this I believe it is essential to listen to LSTs so that their views may be reflected in the evaluation and planning of these courses. According to Hargreaves (1993, p.viii),

Many failed efforts in in-service training, teacher development and educational change more widely are precisely attributable to this neglect of the teacher as a person – to abstracting the teacher's skills from the teacher's self, the technical aspects of the teacher's work from the commitments embedded in the teacher's life.

This study hopes to redress this neglect of the teacher as a person. The life-history approach adopted facilitates the LSTs in representing themselves and their work, in constructing their identity and in articulating what it means, for them, to be LSTs teaching in primary schools in the east-coast of Ireland.

The impetus for the study goes beyond personal benefit. It is hoped that colleagues and fellow professionals involved with LS teaching and in-service provision will find much to interest them. The rationale for the study stems in part from the lack of information available on LS teaching in Ireland. The literature reveals a dearth of qualitative research on this topic. A small body of research exists, but this is all of a quantitative nature, mostly conducted by postal questionnaire (Shiel and Morgan, 1998; Irish National Teachers' Organisation, 1994; Lynch and O'Sullivan, 1986). Other studies include unpublished Master's theses on the management of LS teaching (Carville, 1995; Conroy, 1993). There are no studies on the discourse of LS teaching and no investigations into the life-history or identity of LSTs. There are studies on many different aspects of teachers and teaching, such as teachers' careers (Ball and Goodson, 1985), the life-cycle of teachers (Huberman, 1993b), the impact of marketization on primary schools (Menter et al with Pollard, 1997), or time spent and how it is spent in teaching (Campbell and St. Neill, 1994). However, there appears to be a gap in the research on the specific subgroup of LSTs. While there is now a wider recognition than before, that the teacher's voice needs to be heard, and that personal narrative and autobiographical methods of enquiry provide valuable insights into the work that goes on in schools, (Clements, 1999), the voice of the LST has not yet been heard. The current study hopes to add to the existing research on LS teaching in Ireland by providing qualitative analyses based on the actual accounts of practising LSTs.

The methods chosen for the current study also offer a potential development for life-history methodology. By applying some of the methods and analytical frameworks from the body of biographical research on teachers in general, this study aims to tap into one distinctive category of teachers, LSTs, through the use of the life-history interview. It is hoped that this study of one distinctive group of teachers will contribute to the development of life-history approaches to the study of teachers' lives in general. There is therefore a reflexive relationship between the study of LSTs and the use of life-history approaches. The study asks 'what new insights can a life-history analysis of the lives of LSTs contribute to the further development of life-history approaches to the study of teachers' work and identity?' The application of a life-history approach to this new context further verifies the methodology.

The study is framed by the general, over-arching question 'What does it mean to be a LST working in a primary school in the east-coast of Ireland?' In order to explore this overriding question, a number of supplementary questions are posed:

1. Is there a distinctive discourse of LS teaching? What evidence exists to show that such an order of discourse exists? If there is a discourse of LS teaching, what are its essential features? The study asks whether or not there is a recognisable way of using language that can be described as a discourse of LS teaching. If such a distinctive discourse exists, how does it compare with the discourses of mainstream class-teaching?
2. How are the professional identities of LSTs constructed and how do LSTs themselves account for them? How does the discourse of LS teaching create and reflect the identity of a LST? How do LSTs perceive and describe their own identity? How are LSTs positioned within the discourse of LS teaching and do they accept or resist these positions? The study asks how the content of their work constructs the identity of LSTs and inversely how the identity of LSTs informs the content of their work?

3. What counts as reading for LSTs and how do they teach reading? What models or definitions of the teaching of reading are implicit in LSTs' accounts of their work and identity as LSTs? How do LSTs use language to represent their beliefs about the teaching of reading? What insights into the teaching of reading can be gained from LSTs' articulations, beliefs and values?
4. What professional lessons for the provision of in-service education to LSTs can be learned from LSTs' accounts of their beliefs and work?
5. What contribution can a life-history analysis of the lives of LSTs offer to the further development of life-history approaches to the study of teachers' work and identity?

These are important questions, not just because of their relevance to Irish education at the moment, but also because they are located within a growing academic literature on teacher thinking. These questions go beyond a description of the work of LSTs. Rather than treating the practices of LSTs as an unproblematical given, these questions attempt to uncover the underlying assumptions behind such issues as the teaching of reading and the work of teachers in schools. The study is timely as well as significant because of the rapid expansion of and expenditure in the area of special education in Ireland, of which LS teaching is a major part. Approximately one in fifteen primary teachers are currently employed as LSTs. Over the past decade the government has launched a series of literacy initiatives, such as the National Reading Initiative, as part of a comprehensive policy to combat educational disadvantage and raise literacy standards (see Murphy, 2000 for a review of such initiatives). Since the establishment of the service in the early sixties, LS education has never received as much attention as in the present time. Major developments such as the publication of *The Survey of Remedial Education in Irish Primary Schools* (Shiel and Morgan, 1998), *The Learning Support Guidelines* (Department of Education and Science, 2000) and a plan to provide in-service education on LS to every primary school teacher in the country, have serious implications for both LSTs and

in-service providers. This research offers the possibility of informing the in-service provision for Irish LSTs.

As with any study, there are a number of limitations to the current project. It is worth contextualising these limitations within the self-imposed boundaries placed on the study. The primary means of data collection is interviewing. There are no observations of LSTs' classroom practice and no investigation of their pupils. The choice of method therefore results in constraints on what can eventually be inferred regarding LSTs' practice. However, this study is not a description or evaluation of LSTs' work. Neither is it an examination of LS teaching. It is a study of LSTs' perspectives and of their self-representation. The primary purpose of the study is to tap into the lives and work of LSTs and to re-present their construction of their identity and their work as LSTs. This written text, the thesis, is a re-presentation of the LSTs' presentation of their selfhood and their practices. By necessity and design, the data are all self-reported because as Sikes says (1997, p.135) the purpose was to find out what the teachers "subjectively and qualitatively felt".

However, this study does not merely present the data as self-evident representations of 'reality' or 'truth'. Following Block's (1999) recommendation the data themselves are problematised. The interview data are analysed and interpreted as discourse - that is, "language as social practice determined by social structures" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 17). The way in which the LSTs use language to represent themselves and their work is the object of this study. Working in the interpretive and constructivist paradigm, the stories re-presented here are a joint construction between the LSTs and the researcher. They reflect the multiple identities created by and for the LSTs, as well as the various discourses which were engaged in and drawn upon.

Although the LSTs' accounts in this study are used as a basis for exploring their language, work and identities, a brief summarised description of LSTs' role and work may help contextualise what LSTs in Ireland actually do. LSTs in Irish primary schools are ex-quota teachers who are appointed to

work with pupils in mainstream schools who have low achievement and or learning difficulties. They do not generally work with pupils who have been psychologically assessed as having more serious levels of disability such as mild, moderate or severe and profound general learning difficulties. These pupils are catered for by resource teachers and special-class teachers alongside mainstream teachers or by teachers in special schools. The LST usually provides supplementary teaching in literacy and / or mathematics to pupils in small groups of approximately five by withdrawing them from their mainstream classes for half-hourly lessons. LSTs also work in collaboration with class-teachers in an advisory and consultancy capacity. However, a national survey on LS education found that 85% of LSTs' time was spent working with pupils withdrawn from their mainstream classes. When administrative duties are taken into consideration this leaves very little time for the recommended consultative or resource elements of the job (Shiel and Morgan, 1998).

Since it was established in the 1960s the LS service has expanded and every primary school in the country now has access to a LST. However, although LSTs in large urban areas tend to work in one school only, LSTs in smaller rural areas often serve a cluster of between two and five schools. Not all LSTs have specialist training in LS teaching and it is not a requirement of the job. According to the 1998 survey, cited above, approximately three quarters of LSTs had completed or were in the process of completing a one-year, part-time in-service LSTs' course sanctioned by the Department of Education and Science. As there has been a large increase in the number of LST appointments since 1998, the need for specialised training and in-service professional development has become more pronounced.

Because this is a qualitative study, which uses an essentially grounded approach, it was neither possible nor desirable to anticipate the different kinds of professional, theoretical and methodological issues that would arise from the data. As the various themes emerged from the data, the relevant literature was invoked and used to contextualise the findings in chapters four, five and six. Chapter two, therefore, offers a prospective literature review which contextualises the decision to use a life-history approach and

which provides the information necessary to evaluate the soundness and importance of the research questions. Chapter two also outlines the methodology, describing and offering a justification for the procedures and analysis used in the study. Chapter three presents the LSTs and the more general issues raised by the data before the main themes are reviewed and discussed in chapters four, five and six. The next chapter, seven, summarises and synthesises the findings from the main themes in an attempt to answer the research questions. Chapter eight is an evaluation of the research process, particularly of the development of the researcher as 'instrument'. The thesis concludes by offering a number of summary recommendations and implications for the professional practice of LS teaching in Ireland.

A note regarding the style of writing throughout this paper may be helpful. The impersonal, passive voice, traditionally associated with academic writing, is mixed with that of the personal. The style of writing in the first person is not used simply because it is more comfortable, and perhaps easier. Neither is it used simply because it is the preferred style of presentation for many interpretive studies from the qualitative tradition. The first person is used when I account for what I myself have done, for example in the methodology or evaluation sections or when I make clear my stance regarding various aspects of the research. When I move beyond my personal experience it seems appropriate to use a more detached style.

Note

The term 'learning support teacher' (LST) is used throughout this study as it is the official term used and recommended by the Department of Education and Science in Ireland to describe the teachers in this study (Department of Education and Science, 2000). Historically the term 'remedial teacher' was used and is in fact still widely used particularly by LSTs and schools. The change of name owes much to a growing discourse surrounding the most appropriate form of teaching needed to support pupils who have difficulties in learning in inclusive settings in mainstream schools. It is part of a wider discourse on special educational needs which attempts to move away from the traditional deficit model that fails to recognise differences in learning

and which implies that difficulties in learning can be remedied and cured. In Scotland the term 'remedial teacher' was replaced with 'learning support teacher' in the mid-eighties. Many of the LSTs in this study use both terms, although most of their references in the selected quotations are to remedial teachers.

*Learning support teacher abbreviated to LST.

Learning support abbreviated to LS.

Chapter Two

Research Methodology and Prospective Literature Review

I decided to use life-history methodology for this study because it seemed to be the most promising approach for investigating what it means to be a LST and for addressing the research questions posed in chapter one. Because of the decision to use a life-history approach it followed logically that a substantial literature review, carried out in advance of the interviews, would not serve the study's purpose. Instead, in this chapter I present a justification for the adoption of the life-history approach and a prospective review of the literature that contextualises the starting-out position of the study – that is, my interest in discourse and identity and in the teaching of reading. I then describe how I put the principles of life-history research into practice in the context of this study by outlining the methods of data collection and analysis. Therefore, the four sections in this chapter and the approach taken when reporting the findings, alongside relevant literature reviews in chapters four to six, stem from the initial decision to adopt a life-history approach.

Life-history Methodologies and the Study of LSTs

I chose a life-history approach because the focus of the research and the assumptions underpinning the study demanded the type of detailed information that only such interviews could provide. My intention was to use the interviews to tap into the LSTs' construction of themselves, their lives, work, words, ideas and values. The life-history interview facilitates the elicitation of the required information and also provides a forum for the emergence of unanticipated issues of relevance to the focus of the research. As a respected, and now widely-used research methodology, life-history approaches are recognised as an illuminating instrument for studying teachers' lives. Identity is constructed not just by discourse but also by the lived experience of a person's life along with all its historical, social, cultural and contextual influences. The life history interview allows that lived experience to unfold. However, the study does not simply present the teachers' words as transparent accounts of what it means to be a LST. As

Goodson (1992, p. 6) points out, there is a difference between a life history and a life story – the life story is the story of one's life, while “the life history is the life story located within its historical context”.

Like any other group in society, LSTs operate in contextualised social settings. As well as portraying the individual's perspective, the life history approach connects the individual's story with the wider, historical, cultural, political and social contexts of the time. For as Antikainen et al (1996, p.17) state,

The subjective life-story holds the key position through which, and also in which, the social finds its expression.

Indeed Ball and Goodson (1985) advocate life history methods because they can highlight the political and ideological climates in which teachers' lives are embedded. The rapid expansion of the LS service, the publication of the revised *Primary School Curriculum* (Department of Education and Science, 1999) and *Learning Support Guidelines* (Department of Education and Science, 2000), as well as the recent increased emphasis on accountability in teaching in general are just some of the influences that affect LSTs' lives in schools. The current study gives LSTs an opportunity to comment on these influences and effects while allowing me to analyse their accounts against the prevailing influences and values in education at the present time. As Erben (1998, p.1) points out

individual motivations and social influences have no easy demarcation (and) biographical and autobiographical analyses can only examine the significance of selves in relation to general or prevailing values.

By using a life-history approach, this study contextualises LSTs' lives and stories within the social context in which they live and work.

Teachers are key players in influencing and shaping the educational provision within society. Clements (1999, p. 31) reminds us that

teachers are often the one constant feature in the changing map of educational provision.

They are critically important in studying educational matters and are vital instruments in educational change (Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996; Batten

1993; Kompf, 1993). Life history and narrative approaches are now well established in educational research. Studies by researchers such as Ball and Goodson (1985), Woods (1987), Elbaz (1990), Huberman (1993a,b), and Erben (1998) have demonstrated that life-history methods provide valuable insights into teachers, pupils, schools and educational issues. All the LSTs in this study had a wealth of experience of schools – they had been pupils themselves, they had been class-teachers, were now LSTs and had children who were pupils attending school. Weber and Mitchell (1995) and Mitchell and Weber (1999) invite teachers to use life-history approaches to revisit their past, their attitudes and beliefs, so that they can examine and re-invent themselves as teachers. This process, they claim, helps teachers understand how they have become the sort of teachers they are and helps them become more reflective as practitioners. However, life-history research is not solely for the personal benefit of the teacher-narrators involved. The life-history interview illustrates how various discourses in society, such as the school as an institution, affect teachers' identity and practice. As Hamilton (1993, p. 89) explains,

cultural knowledge is often studied by looking at cultural patterns in one's life history.

The stories the LSTs tell in this study are not told in a vacuum. Their stories both form and stem from the cultural knowledge in which their lives are embedded. They offer an explanation of how they make sense of themselves as LSTs and of their world. This study is concerned with the relationship between the personal and professional experience of LSTs and the wider society in which their stories are located.

As far as I could ascertain from searches of the existing literature on life-history studies into teachers' lives, there are no such investigations into the lives and work of LSTs. There are life history investigations into many different groups of teachers, such as secondary teachers (Huberman, 1993b), primary teachers (Nias, 1989), Catholic women religious teachers (Casey, 1993), lesbian physical education teachers (Clarke, 1998) and parents who are teachers (Sikes, 1997), to mention but a few, but none, that I could locate, on LSTs. The literature on teachers' lives, particularly using life-history approaches, has shown that

teachers' professional behaviour can only be understood when situated in the broader context of their career and personal life history (Kelchtermans, 1993, p.19).

This study contributes to the research methodology and growing literature on teachers' lives, studied by narrative methods, by applying a life-history approach to a distinctive group within the profession – LSTs.

I believe a life-history study of LSTs can make a significant contribution to the theory and practice of education, particularly within the Irish context at the present time. Because of their image, position and work, LSTs are a particularly suitable subject for a life-history study. As already mentioned, special education in Ireland is currently undergoing a period of major expansion and change as pupils with disabilities are increasingly being educated within the mainstream rather than the segregated special educational system. This process derives from a number of sources including recent legislation (Ireland, 1998), the implementation of the recommendations of the Special Education Review Committee (Department of Education, 1993), the growing desire of many parents, teachers and members of the public to provide for all children within the mainstream school and a number of high-profile court-cases on behalf of children with disabilities. Because every primary school in the country has access to a LST, the LST occupies a pivotal position within the mainstream educational system and is well placed to affect, influence, monitor and evaluate these developments. Many teachers appear to be anxious about these changes. Anecdotal evidence suggests that LSTs are perhaps less 'threatening' to mainstream teachers than teachers in full-time segregated special education, who may be perceived as "experts" with knowledge and skills unavailable and unattainable to mainstream class-teachers. This perception may be because LSTs work within the mainstream school, have been appointed from the mainstream body of the class-teaching staff and work primarily with pupils who do not usually have the severity of disability experienced by the typical pupil population of special schools. Whatever the reason, LSTs have the potential to influence the direction of developments in special education. Therefore this study is justified not just by the gap in the literature but also by the possibility of fruitful lessons to be learned from

LSTs' life-histories that could affect the educational provision, inclusion or exclusion of children with disabilities in the mainstream educational system.

Life-history, as a research method, is not without its limitations, difficulties or critics. The concept of subjectivity, the problems inherent in memory and the relationship between the researcher and the researched are but a few (Chamberlayne et al, 2000; Scott, 1998; Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995).

These are all areas of great concern to both quantitative and qualitative traditions in educational research (Price, 1999; Richardson, 1996; Atkinson et al, 1993; De Landsheere, 1993; Eisner, 1993; Phillips, 1993). The life-history interview, however, belongs to the narrative paradigm in educational research, which assumes that knowledge of ourselves, as educators, can be acquired by engaging in different forms of critical memory work or 'story-making'. We make sense of ourselves and our world as individuals and we construct ourselves socially and collectively by making stories. With the rise of interpretive, qualitative research approaches, the dominant position of positivism, with its emphasis on observable, measurable truth, has waned. The stance taken in the current study regarding the concepts of subjectivity, memory and the role of the researcher are now made explicit.

Since the early 1970s the notion of objectivity has been called into question. There is a recognition that 'truth' and understanding can ever only be partial; that individuals exist in particular social, cultural contexts; and that 'reality' is socially and contextually constructed (Ivanic, 1998; Fiske, 1990). Subjectivity is no longer a disreputable concept! As Sikes (2000, p. 267) argues

the purpose of qualitative research is often not so much
'truth' telling as it is story re-presenting.

It is important that the narratives of the LSTs in this study be recognised as subjective accounts; that the inevitable subjectivity and bias on my part, as researcher, in selecting particular LSTs and in collaboratively constructing the narrative, be acknowledged. This type of research privileges the voice and experience of individuals and groups. The life-history narrative allows narrators to construct their stories. Arguing that people are natural storytellers, Hansen-Nelson (1993, p. 151) says

stories about teaching reveal the storyteller's models of teaching.

An essential purpose of the current research was to listen to the LSTs who agreed to participate; to celebrate their subjective evaluations and selections; to re-present their perceptions of and perspectives on LS teaching.

Explaining the value of oral history Casey (1993, p.13) says oral history will illuminate conscious human activity in a way positivism never can.

Nelson's (1992) life-history research into women teachers' experiences in Vermont in the early 1900s shows how her findings challenge the impression gained solely from the study of written documents. There is no substitute for personal testimony. The methods used in this study provide the opportunity for LSTs to explain what it means for them to be a LST. This is not a descriptive study; rather it is one of perspective. As such, it celebrates subjectivity.

Much discussion in the literature on biographical research in education centres on the notion of memory and veridicality or truth content (Clements, 1999; Bornat et al, 2000; Sikes, 2000; Antikainen et al, 1996; Block, 1999; Figueroa, 1998). There are practical issues such as the notion that memory fades with age, that memory is selective, that people have differing perspectives, that remembering is not necessarily chronological. People often like to present themselves in what they consider to be 'the best light' and, as Sikes (2000) tells us, sometimes they deliberately lie. There is no doubt that memory is a re-creation. As the LSTs in this study told their stories they remade and reconstructed their identities and lives. The fact that the interviews were joint constructions between myself as interviewer and themselves as narrators added a further dimension. Questions of 'truth' or veridicality were not really important. The interest of this study lay in the LSTs' versions of how their stories were retold; in re-presenting and interpreting their versions. Apart from deliberate deception, as described by Sikes (2000), the stance taken in this research is that the stories told by the LSTs are "true" because it was in the LSTs' version of their story that I was interested. In studying teachers' lives and attitudes, we must study teachers' words, ideas and beliefs – their stories.

In clarifying my own position as researcher it is important to acknowledge that my relationship with these LSTs has a history. I had once been in a position of power over these LSTs, in the sense that I had been their course tutor when they attended their in-service course for LSTs. This was a year-long, post-graduate course leading to a higher diploma in LS education. I had evaluated and marked their course work, supervised and assessed their teaching practice. I was therefore apprehensive about our relationship in the interview situation and feared that they might feel constrained by, or positioned into, responding and acting in ways that reflected our previous relationship. Most particularly, I did not want them to feel that I was in anyway passing judgement on their reported beliefs, values or practices. There was also the danger that some may have felt obliged to impress, or to conform to what they perceived as my views on LS teaching. They were all aware of my views as these had been made explicit during lectures and tutorials. However, all ten had successfully completed their courses and had been judged to be performing to the highest standards of LS teaching. They were all articulate and confident teachers, of the same ethnic origin and socio-economic status, and approximately the same age, as myself. We therefore shared much cultural, social and historical understanding and experiences. All ten LSTs had shown themselves to be articulate, interested and active course contributors. This was one of the reasons for selecting them for the study, for as Sikes (1997, p. 28) says,

Apart from anything else, life history research demands a certain level of articulateness and a willingness to be reflective.

They had willingly agreed to take part in the research when approached and they certainly gave the impression that they treated me as a respected colleague rather than as a former lecturer. This mutual respect was enhanced by the fact that I had been responsible for involving at least five of them in part-time work on in-service courses for LSTs – for example, hosting visits to their classrooms, reading assignments and providing feedback to students. There was, in fact, an element of student-teacher role reversal as I was now the student and they the teachers, helping me with my studies. Thus the relationship between the ‘researcher’ and the ‘researched’ had been evolving over a number of years.

At heart I view myself as a teacher. Above all else, I am interested in the teaching-learning process - that is, in how teachers teach and in how students learn. My empathy tends to lie with the teacher and his or her students, as they act out their roles in the cut and thrust of the classroom. Teachers, how they teach and how they think about their teaching, were the guiding principles and motivation for this study. The implications of the LSTs' accounts for professional practice was an essential part of this project. As a provider of in-service education for LSTs I needed to listen carefully, engage with and interpret their accounts. Although one can never be sure, I think the LSTs taking part in this study recognised and appreciated my current position. I had been a class-teacher, a LST and a teacher of children with special needs for sixteen years before becoming a lecturer in a Department of Special Education in a national College of Education. The fact that I had shared many of the same teaching experiences as the LSTs and had a good knowledge of the theoretical and practical basis of their work enhanced my credibility as a researcher and enabled us to share in a common discourse of LS teaching. A large part of my own identity is that I am a teacher with a particular interest in LS teaching. The corollary of this 'insider' knowledge and experience is the danger that I could perhaps be too close to the focus of the research. For example, one of the difficulties I had in trying to unpack the terminology used by the LSTs and uncover its underlying assumptions was the fact that they talked to me as a fellow professional, presuming a familiarity with and a shared understanding of the jargon of LS teaching. They did not feel obliged to explain terms and ideas that have become naturalised or part of the commonsense discourse of LS teaching. This is where my role in interpreting their accounts came to the fore. As this is a study of discourse, one of its major purposes is to unpack that very jargon.

Although we shared much in common there were also important differences in perspectives between the narrators and myself. While I was extremely interested in the practical aspects of their work, I also wanted to investigate the theoretical frameworks which underpinned their teaching. The differences between us appeared to stem from my interest in the more theoretical issues raised by the research as it progressed. The LSTs did not

appear to share this interest. For example, when I encouraged them to discuss the concepts and philosophy underpinning their approaches and methods they preferred to describe actual incidences of practice. Their reluctance to contextualise and conceptualise their work within broader, theoretical views of teaching and literacy is not surprising. Teachers are rarely called upon to articulate their conceptual frameworks and these LSTs were all overtly concerned with the practice of LS teaching (Brown and McIntyre, 1993). In fact their interest in the grounded, practical nature of teaching is one of the major themes which arose from this study. One of the effects of this difference in perspective was that a certain distance was created between us, which I felt was no harm. As well as protecting both the narrators and myself, it enabled me to enjoy the dual perspective of 'insider' and 'outsider'. Overall I considered the advantages of this dual perspective outweighed the disadvantages, by allowing me to bring theoretical and professional questions to bear on my colleagues that they might not necessarily have asked themselves. I hoped the findings would enable me to marry my practice as an in-service provider more closely to the LSTs' beliefs and needs. My current work in providing in-service education for LSTs and my previous experience as a LST therefore influenced my choice of methodology.

It was not possible or desirable to write myself, as researcher, out of the interviews or the research, even using such democratic research methodology as life-history. I was not a detached observer. Life-history is a very human form of research. The relationship between the researcher and the researched was a critical element in the making of the story of this study. The interview is a social process, facilitating people's perceptions and perspectives, in a particular context, at a particular time. Analysis and reporting of the findings are necessarily tentative and provisional. This research report, just one of many readings, is a reconstruction of the joint construction of the stories we made. However, it is important not to lose sight of the original research questions which formed the framework for the life-history interviews. As Erben (1998, p.16) points out, biographical research needs empirical information as well as "imaginative reconstruction and narrative analysis". Before describing the analysis and reconstruction,

where the life-history interview data were treated both discursively, as problematic discourse, and as an empirical source of answers to the specific research question (what does it mean to be a LST working in a primary school in the east-coast of Ireland?), I now present a brief literature review as this informs the methodology.

Prospective Literature Review

Discourse and identity

This prospective review of the literature situates the starting point for the current study by highlighting the relationship between identity and discourse. The construction of identity is dealt with on two theoretical levels which are closely linked. The identity of the LST is firstly constructed culturally, historically and ideologically by society and secondly, by the language used in and surrounding the discourse of LS teaching. Because language is a social process this second element arises naturally from the first. It is also given more attention because of the emphasis on language in this study. The third section of the review considers the conception of individual as opposed to social identity in the light of the previous discussion on identity and discourse. The review then examines the ways in which identity is also constructed by the social practices in which people engage. The key social practices for the LSTs in this study are the literacy practices associated with the discourse of LS teaching. In order to contextualise the study's interest in LSTs' views on the teaching of reading, the final section of the review discusses the central literacy practices involved in the teaching of reading.

The study is based on the assumption that it is not possible to separate "the private self from social context" (Ivanic, 1998, p. 10). It draws on postmodern and social constructivist theories which argue that individuals are not in complete control of their own identity. Instead their identity is socially constructed and determined by their participation in social practices (Gee, 1999; Fairclough, 1989; 1992; Fiske, 1987; 1990). The study is particularly interested in how the identity of LSTs is constructed through their participation in discourse, that is, through their use of language as a

social practice. Although we have a unique biological and psychological make-up and can be described by such characteristics as gender or age, human beings are also constructed in time and space by social processes and experiences. As Price (1993, p. 36) states, the 'nature / nurture' debate is confusing because

the person we are when born and the person we become
are difficult to separate.

Cultural, political and historical factors as well as our personal experiences and environments all shape the different identities we come to inhabit throughout a lifetime. Fiske (1987, p. 258) argues that we should replace the idea of the individual with that of the subject (because) the individual is produced by nature, the subject by culture.

It is into the subjectivity of the LST as a social construction that this study probes. The study concentrates on how the identity of the LST is formed by being part of a discourse community. The LSTs in this study help to shape and are shaped by the discourse of LS teaching. The study therefore investigates the social network of LS teaching which, like any discourse community, is historically, culturally, politically and ideologically constructed, determined and maintained.

The social construction of identity

Identity is socially constructed. As Ivanic (1998, p. 12) says, identity is not the product of individuals' minds and intentions(but is the) result of affiliation to particular beliefs and possibilities which are available to.... (people) in their social context.

In the Marxist tradition of social theorists such as Althusser and Foucault, society is comprised of various practices - economic, political and ideological, which make up the social formation. While these areas of social practice do not exhaust human experience, they

designate key arenas within which individuals find their
social identity within the social formation (White, 1987, p.
166).

Individuals assume positions in society in relation to their social world. Society offers a range of possible roles, or what Fairclough (1989) calls subject positions, for people to adopt. Like all groups, LSTs too are offered a limited range of subject positions and by adopting these, their identity as LSTs is constructed. Certain roles are favoured by different groups in society. It is the powerful groups who dominate and maintain their power by winning the consent of the subordinate groups in society to assume these favoured subject positions. The basic Marxist philosophy holds true - social relations are understood in terms of power and struggles for power which are never static but are always in contestation.

This contestation is best understood in terms of Gramsci's hegemonic struggle whereby the ideas and interests of the dominant class become the ideas of all classes in society, including those whose own interests are not best served by these dominant ideas (Entwistle, 1979; Forgacs, 1988). Because hegemony is achieved by winning consent to and participation in the ideas and practices of the dominant ruling class, the subordinate classes reproduce these ideas. However, hegemony is unstable and is constantly open to resistance. It is only ever achieved temporarily and incompletely. Therefore the dominant groups in society must constantly fight to win and rewin this consent. Social relations and the discourse practices through which they are played out are characterised by struggles for power. Thus, according to Fairclough (1992, p. 50),

Power is implicit within everyday social practices.
....power does not work negatively by forcefully
dominating those who are subject to it; it incorporates
them, and is 'productive' in the sense that it shapes and
'retools' them to fit in with its needs.

In the struggle for power, the construction of commonsense operates as a key hegemonic strategy. Although they may appear to be neutral, social conventions, ideas, beliefs, values and subject positions are always related to power. The struggle concerns which ideas and conventions become naturalised and taken for granted thus rendering them commonsense. These ideas and conventions rest on assumptions which are ideological. Social practices including language embody these assumptions and through

discourse practices perpetuate them. In this way, discourse works ideologically to consolidate and ensure the continuation of existing practices of power and social relations in society. All institutions, such as schools, the family, or in Althusser's (1971) terminology, Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), offer a limited range of discourse types. These discourse types fit into what Fairclough (1989) calls larger orders of discourse which constrain practice at an individual and societal level. By offering a number of positions for participants to uphold, individual subjectivity is limited to these fixed positions. As Ivanic (1998, p. 23) states

Individuals are constrained in their selection of discourses
by those to which they have access and by the patterns of
privileging which exist among them.

The current study examines the social practices of LSTs out of which the discourses of LS teaching arise. In order to investigate how LSTs cope with the discourse and institutional practices into which they are positioned and constrained, it is necessary to examine the discursive conventions of LS teaching in general while also studying individual LSTs' particular beliefs and ways of working. This study attempts to do both.

The construction of identity through language

The role of language in the LSTs' construction of identity is integrally connected to the previous discussion on the power relations involved in the ideological construction of identity. According to Gee (1999, p. 13)

identities and activities are enacted in and through
language

As one of the most common forms of social behaviour within society, language offers the current study a valuable tool with which to investigate the identity and activities of the LST. Fairclough (1992) outlines how language has a key role within social phenomena and the identities people inhabit are integrally bound up with the language they use in their social interaction and practice. He links language to the production and interpretation processes engaged in by people when they interact within the social context in which they live (1989). This emphasis on language as a social process owes much to Halliday's (1978; 1994) social-semiotic perspective which regards language as one of a range of sign systems which

is inextricably connected to its meaning and use. Claiming that Halliday stops short of developing a theory of social identity, Ivanic (1998) builds on his three meanings or functions of language (ideational, interpersonal and textual) to show how they all contribute to the construction of social identity. From ideational meaning, she contends that social identity consists of “a person’s set of values and beliefs about reality”; from interpersonal meaning, social identity “consists of a person’s sense of their relative status in relation to others with whom they are communicating”; and from textual meaning, Ivanic claims that one’s social identity “is a person’s orientation to language use and this will affect the way they construct their message” (p. 40). The life-history approach adopted in this study uses these three sources to draw a picture of what it means to be a LST from the LSTs’ accounts of their identity.

This social view of language builds on the Bakhtinian idea of the social origin of speech and on the concept of the utterance as a social phenomenon (Todorov, 1984). Social language theorists and semioticians reject the commonly-held view that language is an autonomous entity that acts as a vehicle for the transmission of thoughts from speakers and writers to listeners and readers. Instead language is viewed as a social process. As such and as the previous discussion of power relations within society shows, language works ideologically to exercise and maintain power. Language is regarded as problematic in the sense that it is never neutral or static. Meaning is not fixed or universal, but is only ever provisional, partially understood and interpreted in its social context (Graddol, 1994). The literature draws heavily on the notion of intertextuality which Fiske (1987, p. 284) describes as the ways in which texts are always read in the context of other texts. Intertextuality is a key concept in this study because of its importance in the construction of identity through language. According to Ivanic (1998, p. 83)

One of the ways in which people identify with a community is through the intertextual process of adopting its discourse.

In their accounts of themselves and their practices, the LSTs draw intertextually on the various discourses to which they have been exposed

and have access to as well as on the discourses of LS teaching. Their accounts are “full of snatches of other texts” (from Bakhtin, Fairclough, 1992, p. 84). For as Gee (1999, p. 54) points out

Words have histories. They have been in other people’s mouths and on other people’s pens. They have circulated through other Discourses and within other institutions.

Far from being a monolithic, universally-transparent form of communication, language is a dynamic form of social action and practice whereby people interact to produce and interpret meaning against the historical, social and cultural contexts in which they find themselves.

The concept of discourse is useful when discussing language as action and practice rather than simply as a form of representation. The fact that the literature offers such a wide variety of definitions and explanations of discourse points to the complexity and impossibility of a universally-acceptable understanding. These definitions range from such narrow descriptions of discourse as a specialised form of spoken language, to all-encompassing ones that include all the social practices surrounding specific systems of beliefs, values and relations of power (Gee’s 1999, p. 7 capital *D* as opposed to his small *d* for discourse). However, there appears to be general consensus regarding some of the defining characteristics of discourse – it is always concerned with language and with texts, be they linguistic or non-linguistic texts; it is a process, a form of action, as well as a product and as such it is integrally connected to social action and practice; it is never neutral but is always linked to relations of power. As a social practice, language is used as a key hegemonic tool for perpetuating unequal relations of power between people and groups in society.

Subjectivity manifests itself in and through discourse. According to Ivanic (1998, p. 17)

Discourse is the mediating mechanism in the social construction of identity.

The LSTs in this study have to negotiate their way through the various subject positions that are offered to them by the discourse of LS teaching. For as Ivanic (1998, p. 182) says

‘who we are’ means, firstly, the subject positions and social relations which are set up for us as a consequence of our social class, ethnicity, gender, physical build, abilities and disabilities, and the way these are constructed in the socio-cultural context in which we live.

This study attempts to give a sense of the kinds of discourses which the LSTs use to account for themselves and to use these accounts as a window onto their professional identities. The findings give extensive examples of their accounts and the meanings they attach to the language and terminology they use. The professional jargon of LSTs forms their identity because a person’s identity is constructed by the language they use. Because the meaning of language comes from its context of use, a study of how language is contextualised within the discourse of LS teaching should yield insights into the meaning and function of that language.

The fact that discourse is integrally linked to the exercise of power highlights the important relationship between language as a social process and ideology. According to current critical social language theorists, discourse works ideologically to achieve and maintain power (Stierer and Bloome, 1994, p. 3). Power exerted in a physical or aggressive sense is easy to detect. However, it is less visible when it is exercised ideologically through social practice, particularly through language which embodies ideologies that have achieved commonsense status. As Inglis (1990, p. 76) points out power in this sense

is contained in the unnoticed limits of our language, those which define and regulate such key moral notions as ‘the individual’, ‘a person’, ‘identity’

According to Fairclough (1992), language is the chief means by which ideology is propagated - assumptions are embedded in the language we use; these assumptions are ideologically formed; and by appealing to commonsense they maintain and reproduce the unequal power relations by which our society is governed. Fiske (1990, p.165) reiterates this view claiming that ideology is socially rather than individually determined. Ideology becomes social through use and expression. Thus Fiske, (1987, p. 258) talks of the constant

construction of a subject, by which we mean the constant reproduction of ideology in people.....we are...constructed as a subject in, and subject to, ideology.

We are constantly constructed as subjects in ideologies that work to maintain and serve the interests of the dominant groups in society. The construction of identity cannot be discussed without reference to the pervasive ideological workings of power relations within society. This study analyses the discourse of LS teaching in an effort to uncover some of the ideologies and assumptions underpinning the LSTs' sense of their identity and their work practices. Because, as Fairclough (1992, p. 87) says, ideology "has a material existence in the practices of institutions" this study can examine the discourse practices of LSTs as "material forms of ideology". By analysing their accounts in this manner, seemingly commonsense terminology and taken-for-granted practices may be uncovered as the ideological workings of power. The data are analysed to investigate the position of LSTs in the power relationships of educational institutions. The school, acting as one of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses discussed earlier, constructs the identity of LSTs by offering them a limited number of subject positions. LSTs, like all teachers, are positioned by the wider structures of ideology and power. They also position themselves within the educational institutions. At the same time they are themselves powerful in the sense that they can position pupils and colleagues through their use of discourse. This study examines the LSTs' accounts to see if and how they position those with whom they work through their discourse practices. The study asks if and how LSTs are members of a powerful group. Conversely, it also questions if and how LSTs are subjected to a form of hegemony which is perpetuated by powerful institutions, such as schools, and mediated through discourse.

The conception of individual identity

The determinism and inevitability of the ideological effects of discourse, outlined above, call the agency of the individual into question. There is plenty of controversy in the literature regarding the ability of and the resources within the individual to resist or challenge the powers of

discourse. For example, while sociolinguistics as well as much more critical social conceptions of language, such as those advocated by theorists like Foucault and Fairclough, agree that language practice cannot be separated from its social context, they disagree fundamentally in their conception of individual identity. Sociolinguistics has a liberal humanist rationale which affirms individuals as rational beings who define their social identity by their affiliation with specific social groups through their language choices (Holmes, 1992). More critical social theorists such as Gee (1999) and Ivanic (1998) regard individual choice as a “miscognition” or an “illusion of autonomy” created and perpetuated by commonsense assumptions that people have been positioned into believing and upholding (Fairclough, 1994, E825, audio-cassette, 1 Band 9). Sociolinguistics is regarded as too simplistic a view of the relationship between language and society. Not only does society shape language, as sociolinguists claim, but more importantly and less visibly, language shapes and influences society. The critical social theory of language, which underpins the current study, claims that identity is constructed by our experience with discourse, that is, with language as a social process and with our experiences of being placed in a range of subject positions.

The postmodernist stance taken in this study refutes the traditional western view of a monolithic, autonomous and complete individual operating as a unified person in all contexts. Rather, the individual is regarded as diverse and contradictory. There is no such thing as a single, fixed, individual identity. We are composite personalities dispersed among various subject positions. Different facets of the person are invoked for various purposes within different contexts. As Gee says (1999, p. 16) we have multiple identities which are always provisional and “becoming”. Subjectivity is pieced together through discourse, through our fragmentary experiences of language. For as Graddol says (1994, p. 2)

The fragmentary nature of linguistic experience both
reflects and is the cause of this fractured personal identity.

LSTs, like any other humans, are not in full control of their own identity. They are both constrained and created by multiple discourses, among which the discourse of LS teaching is but one. Street (1994) argues that different

facets of the person are invoked for various purposes and within different contexts. LSTs are fragmented, composite personalities occupying a range of subject positions and many different identities (Saxena, 1994). By occupying various subject positions and by participating in the practices of LS teaching, the identity of the LST is created - they become LSTs. As Fairclough (1989, p. 38) says, they are what they do. This study investigates the different discourses that come into play as LSTs switch and overlap between the range of possible positions that exist for them to occupy, that is, as they engage in the discourse of LS teaching.

The notion of multiple identities is also reflected in the literature on teachers' lives. According to Ball and Goodson, (1985, p. 18)

the ways in which teachers achieve, maintain and develop their identity, their sense of self, in and through a career, are of vital significance in understanding the actions and commitments of teachers in their work.

The life-history interview used in this study is a most suitable instrument for investigating the multiple identities LSTs occupy and for discussing their perceptions of these identities. An analysis of how the LSTs in this study construct their identities will shed light on the discourse of LS teaching. Nias also reports this dichotomy of self in her studies of teachers' lives (1985; 1989), where teachers struggle to reconcile the separation between their identity as teachers and their identity as people with lives outside teaching. According to Nias's longitudinal study of primary teachers, many teachers "incorporate an occupational identity into their self-image" (1989, p. 3). Fairclough and Graddol (1994, The Open University, E825 audio-cassette 1, Band 9) also talk about people transferring the sets of identities that are set up in one discourse practice to another discourse practice – for example, behaving like a teacher at home. The person is not separate from the job and the more teachers invest in the job, the more committed they become in a personal way, which affects their lives outside as well as inside school. Because LS teaching centres around children with learning difficulties, it is likely that LSTs are required to invest very heavily in a personal manner in their teaching. The LSTs in this study are asked about

the separation between their personal and professional lives, with a view to examining the construction of their multiple identities.

Not all critical social language theorists hold such a deterministic view of the individual's inability to resist the effects of discourse or to escape ideology. Fairclough summarises much of the literature on the dialectical process in discourse whereby a subject is both created and creative. He argues that

Social determination and individual creativity are not the opposites they appear to be (1989, p. 169).

Although structures are imposed on people, the individual possesses the ability to operate within the resources generated by the structures. He argues that discursive practices are "creative" as well as "conventional" and can contribute to social change (1992, pp. 65; 91). Fairclough calls for Critical Language Study (CLS) as the hope for recognising and resisting the way in which language positions people into unequal relations of power. He calls for the need to address the ideological nature of language as a major theme of modern science. He views this language education as a means whereby people can

become more aware of their own practice, and be more critical of the ideologically invested discourses to which they are subjected (1992, p. 90).

Ivanic (1998, p. 11) also offers some ray of hope for individual choice by using the term "possibilities of self-hood" rather than subject positions, claiming that her terminology allows for the multiple dimensions and identities available to people. She talks of the

tension between the freedom people have to identify with particular subject positions through their selection among discursual resources and the socially determined restrictions on those choices (1998, p.11).

However, both Fairclough and Ivanic warn of the danger of overstating the agency of the individual. Fairclough (1992, p. 72) claims that people are generally unaware of how their practices are

shaped by social structures, relations of power and the nature of the social practice they are engaged in.

This study takes the view that whether or not people are aware of the ideological assumptions underpinning their practices and their sense of their own identity, they have no real control over the determining forces of ideology expressed through discourse. Because it presents itself as neutral and commonsense, ideology is constantly reproduced through our participation in discourse. It is an illusion, a 'false consciousness', to think that a study such as this can uncover the 'objective reality' or 'truth' about LS teaching. This study can only hope to gain some understanding of the ways meanings are produced within a section of the social community of LSTs at a given time— these meanings are always shaped and constructed by the linguistic, cultural, historical and ideological structures of our society.

The teaching of reading

If as Gee claims (1994, p.168)

discourse practices are integrally connected with the identity or sense of self of the people who practise them it follows that the identity of LSTs is "integrally connected" with the discourse practices of LS teaching. Acknowledging that LSTs occupy many different roles and positions during the course of their work, this study examines the different practices in which they engage and how LSTs' identities are constructed through these practices. A key practice associated with the discourse of LS teaching is the discourse of teaching reading. Indeed, the teaching of reading constitutes the main work of LSTs in Irish primary schools according to a recent survey of all primary schools with the service of a LST -

just under 74% of instructional time was devoted to remedial teaching of English, while 12% was allocated to remedial teaching in mathematics (Shiel and Morgan, 1998, p. 29).

Because of this, the current study is situated within the domain of research and scholarship concerned with the teaching of reading. By recounting examples of particular reading practices and by discussing their views on

various theories of teaching reading, the ten LSTs participating in the study are invited to paint a picture of what counts as reading for them. It is anticipated that the specific work of LSTs in Ireland will raise significant professional and theoretical issues relating to the teaching of reading in general.

LSTs are often regarded rather unproblematically as teachers of children who have difficulties with reading. However, the literature on the teaching of reading reveals an area fraught with controversy which attracts a diverse range of opinions from those in and outside educational circles (Chall, 1967; 1983, 2nd edn ; 1996, 3rd edn ; Adams, 1990; Beard, 1993; Meek, 1991; Willinsky, 1990; Street, 1994; Kress, 1997; Shannon, 2000). This study addresses the LSTs' stance and perspective in the midst of these debates. There is a commonsense view that teaching and learning reading involves acquiring a set of autonomous and universally-accepted skills which gives people access to and mastery of a detached entity called 'reading'. Street (1984) rejects this limited perspective, claiming that literacy is ideological rather than autonomous. The reason the traditional cognitive-based view, outlined above, has gained the privileged status of commonsense is because of the ideological workings of discourse which operate to the advantage of the dominant and powerful groups in society who define such intrinsically indefinable concepts as 'reading' to suit their own purposes. This study takes the stance that reading is a social process which cannot be divorced from its context of use. Reading is an ideological social practice through which people interact with each other and with the world in which they live.

Stressing the plural rather than the singular form of the noun, Ivanic (1998, p. 19) describes literacies as

the culturally shaped practices surrounding the use of
written language, among which, what might be called
'linguistic practices' are a subset.

Her emphasis on the uses of written language is typical of the current social view of literacy prevalent in the research literature (Kamil et al, 2000; Kress, 1997; Luke, 1988; Maybin, 1994; Auerbach, 1992). This view of teaching reading focuses on the meaning-making aspect of and the purposes

for which reading is used, the contexts in which it is used and the practices people engage in when they are involved in reading. It stresses the social processes and contexts surrounding literacy events and literacy acts (Heath, 1983;1991; Street, 1984; 1994; Barton and Padmore 1994). Just as there is a variety of literacy practices which change from one social setting to the next, so too there is a variety of practices involved in the teaching of reading. Because they are tied to specific discourse practices, reading practices operate in the same way as Fairclough (1989, p. 25) describes the operation of discourse – that is, as text, interaction and context. To be engaged in a literacy act is to interact within specific social contexts in order to produce and interpret meaning from linguistically-based texts.

Just as there is no single individual identity, but multiple composite social identities, so too there is no single literacy, but multiple literacies and multiple reading practices. By participating in reading practices in particular social situations, one is positioned socially. As the first part of this review of literature outlined, identity is constructed by the practices in which one engages. Thus identity is constructed by the literacy practices in which one engages. This study examines the LSTs' accounts of the many different types of practices related to the teaching of reading, in which they engage. Ivanic (1998, p. 67) claims that these practices
are both shaped by and shapers of people's identity:
acquiring certain literacy practices involves becoming a
certain type of person.

In an effort to answer the overriding research question 'what does it mean to be a LST?', this study analyses LSTs' accounts of their work practices in order to see what type of people they present themselves to be.

The purpose of this brief review of literature was to contextualise the issues which initiated the starting-out position of the study and the decision to adopt the life-history research methodology. As signalled in chapter one, a more detailed review of the literature on the teaching of reading follows in chapter five, where issues relating to the teaching of reading, which arose from the interviews, are discussed. The next part of this chapter outlines the methods of data collection used for the study.

Methods of Data Collection

This section describes the research procedures used throughout the study by outlining the context, sample and research instruments in detail. A discussion of ethical issues is followed by a description of how the data were analysed.

The sample and context

Ten LSTs, five men and five women, ranging in age from thirty-six to fifty-five years, were interviewed for approximately two hours each, between January 1999 and July 2000. When I approached each LST either by telephone or in person I explained the purpose of the study, assured them of confidentiality and received permission to tape-record the interviews. As I explained above, I knew all the LSTs personally as I had been their course tutor. Although I had observed their teaching while they were course-participants it would be inappropriate to include evidence from these observations in the current analysis as my purpose, as course-tutor, was by definition evaluative. Those observations had an entirely different purpose from the kinds of observations I would have carried out had I been observing them, with their knowledge and consent, for the purposes of research. Because it was deemed to be the most suitable methodology for the purposes of the study, the life-history interview was the principal source of information. We had a good relationship and now treated each other as respected colleagues. They all agreed to participate in the research as a favour to me and because they believed their involvement would help them to reflect on their own work. The interviews took place either in their classrooms or in their homes. Details of these LSTs are provided in chapter three.

Research instruments

The main research instrument was the life-history interview with subsequent analysis. A series of discussions was also conducted with four different groups of twenty-five LSTs who were attending in-service courses on LS teaching between 1998 and 2001. The first of these discussions was used to

help construct the semi-structured interview schedule for a pilot interview with a LST (Appendix A). As a result, the interview schedule for the ten main interviews was considerably altered and developed – questions and prompts were added and clarified for understanding, as some of the original pilot questions proved to be too limiting and tended to lead the LST too much; themes and potentially interesting themes which emerged were incorporated. Because of the emphasis on progressive focussing (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), the interview schedule continued to change until the fifth interview, by which time the issues and themes had settled down to a fairly consistent pattern. (See Appendices A and B for differences between the pilot and final interview schedules). While the schedule ensured that issues relating to the focus of the research were included, this flexible approach allowed me to pursue promising lines of enquiry and develop the methodology at the same time. Thus there was a good fit between the purpose and methodological tools of the study.

Further changes were also made as a result of the pilot interview. Because much valuable interview time was taken up with what could be considered unproblematic, factual information, such as number of years teaching, qualifications and teacher colleges attended, a questionnaire, designed to elicit this information, was constructed (Appendix C). The fact that this questionnaire remained unaltered confirms that this information was regarded as unproblematic. The questionnaire was posted to the first LST in advance, thereby allowing extra time in the first interview for more substantial issues directly relevant to the research questions. However, on reflection, it was felt that this questionnaire could usefully serve as an ice-breaker by starting with apparently non-threatening issues. Therefore, the initial part of the subsequent nine interviews was devoted to the questionnaire. This proved to be a useful strategy, achieving the purposes of putting the LSTs and researcher at ease and allowing for a fuller expansion of seemingly general-type issues than could be afforded by a postal questionnaire. In many cases the questionnaire was completed over a cup of tea and the matters discussed during this time actually foreshadowed some of the issues which arose subsequently during the course of the interviews.

All interviews were audio-taped and then transcribed in full, using Swann's standard layout (1994, p. 40). The literature on qualitative interviewing provided guiding principles for conducting the interviews – a natural, conversational style was used; as far as possible, concrete examples and recall of actual activities and practices were sought; sensitive issues were handled discreetly, indirectly and often intuitively. (Nias, 1989; Hammersley, 1996; Scheurich, 1995; Spradley, 1979; Mishler, 1986; Scott, 1996). Field notes, which added contextual and background information, were recorded during and immediately after each interview. A research diary was also kept which, together with the field notes, allowed for the recording of impressions of, and reactions to, notable issues that occurred during the collection of data.

While it was time-consuming and much of the data were not used because they were not deemed relevant to the current study, full transcription of all interviews proved to be invaluable. Writing in longhand allowed me to mull over the data as it appeared on the page. The text came to life again with the LSTs' voices and evoked vivid recall of facial expressions, gestures and details of the actual interviews. Mindful that the transcripts were now secondary data and transformed by the act of recording, analysis and interpretation coincided with the act of transcribing. There was no division between data production and analysis. The emphasis was on interpretation from the start (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), for as Sikes (1997, p.17) says

.....stories mean nothing on their own (but are made meaningful by collaborative interactions which) include the interpretations made by tellers and hearers.

Again this approach matched the grounded model chosen as the most suitable for this study.

The discussions with the four groups of LSTs attending in-service courses lasted ninety minutes each. While the main focus was on how the LSTs perceived the role of the LST, these discussions covered a wide range of topics which fed into the key issues of concern to the study – that is, the identity and work practices of the LST. One of my colleagues chaired these

discussions, thereby allowing me take notes and join in the discussion as an active participant. Documents relevant to LS teaching in Ireland were studied in order to provide background, contextual and comparative material (Department of Education, 1988; 1993; 1999; 2000; Irish National Teachers' Organisation, 1994; Lynch and O'Sullivan, 1986; Carville, 1996; Shiel and Morgan, 1998). These added to the information supplied by the interviews. The LSTs' timetables, programmes of work and records of progress were also examined and used to check and cross-reference their oral accounts. These measures served to triangulate the findings.

Ethical issues

Care was taken to adhere to the ethical requirements of such a study, not just because good research demands it, but out of respect and appreciation for the LSTs who were so generous to me (Barrett, 2000; Hammersley, 1996; Robson, 1993; Kimmel, 1988). I outlined clearly the purpose of the research, explaining to them what their commitment would involve and informed them of my intentions regarding the results and dissemination of the study. I assured them that all aspects of their identity and that of their pupils and schools would remain confidential. While there was no formal respondent validation, in that I did not show the LSTs the interview transcripts, I was in contact with many of them throughout the study period apart from the actual interviews. We discussed matters raised by the interviews; some of them telephoned me after the interviews to furnish me with further information which they thought might be relevant to the study. Together we were able to clarify and validate much of the content of the interviews. By using a grounded approach, I endeavoured to stay as scrupulously close as possible to the data. I also kept a research diary and used it, amongst other reasons, to regularly question myself regarding my relationship with the LSTs and my treatment of the research tools at my disposal.

As researcher, I was a major research instrument for this study. It was I who decided on the participants, the questions and issues to include in the semi-structured interview schedule and how the data would be interpreted. Most of all, I entered into a relationship with the LSTs and together we

constructed stories of what it means to be a LST working in a primary school in the east-coast of Ireland. Discussing the

unequal relations which shape the relation between
researcher and the researched,

Glucksmann (1994, p. 144) argues that the researcher holds all the power in the oral history interview situation. However, every effort was made to privilege the LSTs' voices, thereby shifting as much power as possible from the researcher to the narrators. Recognising that the power is always tipped in favour of the researcher, my intention was that the interviews would be based on collaboration and reciprocity. I was open and honest with and respectful towards the LSTs; I was genuinely interested in their accounts and made every effort to avoid any judgement of what they were saying during the interviews; they said they found the experience to be beneficial and I certainly felt honoured to be privy to their stories. Life-history research has the potential to be emancipatory and empowering. The LSTs in this study were given a 'voice' in the sense that their stories were valued and retold. This is a distinctive group of teachers within the main body of the teaching profession and as far as I am aware, their stories have not been heard in this manner before. However, it would be misleading to suggest that I acted as some form of medium 'giving voice' to the LSTs so that they could 'tell their stories' in the manner envisioned by deliberate advocacy or empowering research (Cameron et al 1994; Coffey, 1999; Barone, 1995). Although many of the LSTs declared their appreciation of being "listened to", of being "given a voice" and welcomed the opportunity to talk about their professional lives and practices, the research was essentially 'done on' rather than 'for' or 'with' them. Thus, this study is a presentation of my analysis and interpretation of their accounts. According to Erben (1998, p. 9)

The majority of time spent in presenting qualitative
research is not in replicating data but in its interpretation.

I now turn to a description of how I analysed the data in order to be able to interpret them.

Methods of Data Analysis

The conceptual frameworks invoked for the discussion on identity and discourse outlined earlier in this chapter underpin the analytical approach used in this study. Analysis of the data rests on a post-structuralist, social constructivist view of the world. Such a view implies that meaning or 'truth' are not static but are always tentative, dependent on the context and interpretation of the participants involved. Although there is a commonsense notion that it is a neutral medium which represents and describes 'reality', language actually constructs 'reality'. As Coyle (2000, p. 252) says

Language, in the form of discourses, constitutes the building blocks of 'social reality'.

The discourse and discourse practices, as related by the LSTs in their life-history interviews, were analysed in order to shed light on how LSTs constructed their 'social reality', their identity and their work. Analysis goes beyond description to an examination of how the LSTs used language to construct their versions of their personal and professional lives. It is as Gee (1999) says a study of 'language-in-use', of the discourse practices of LSTs, for "language has meaning only in and through practices" (p. 8).

The analysis of the LSTs' life-histories is therefore grounded in an analysis of discourse. According to Potter (1996, p. 129)

Discourse analysis focuses on talk and texts as social practices and on the resources that are drawn on to enable those practices.

This study analyses the linguistic and social resources upon which the LSTs drew to represent themselves and their work. It investigates how the social reality of LS teaching is linguistically, culturally and historically constructed. As language users, the LSTs both selected and rejected from amongst the discourse positions and resources that were available to them. In analysing their accounts

the focus is constantly alternating between what is "there" in the text, and the discourse type(s) which the text is drawing upon (Fairclough, 1989, p. 110).

Therefore analysis of the data involved shifting between the transcripts of their accounts and identifying and interpreting the various discourses upon which the LSTs drew. The LSTs drew on social networks that enabled them to identify and affiliate with the discourse of LS teaching. It was possible to detect various discourses in their accounts as they drew intertextually on the discourse types available to them. These instances of what Fairclough (1992, pp. 117-118) calls interdiscursivity, (where “a discourse type is constituted through a combination of elements of orders of discourse” as opposed to manifest intertextuality where “specific other texts are overtly drawn upon within a text”), were analysed in order to present a picture of the LSTs’ representation of their identity and work. Because, as Ivanic (1998, p. 48) says, a person’s identity is constructed by the language they use “.....interdiscursivity is a central concept for a theory of language and identity”

Just as “the key to Discourses is recognition” (Gee, 1999, p. 18) in the sense that others must recognise the LSTs as members of the discourse community of LS teaching in order for them to have “pulled off a Discourse” of LS teaching, recognising these instances of intertextuality formed an important part of the analysis of the data for this study.

Alternating between the raw transcripts, the relevant research literature and on what Fairclough (1989) would call the LSTs’ members’ resources (MR) involved a multi-layered approach to the analysis of the data. According to Fairclough (p. 24) people have MR

in their heads and draw upon (them) when they produce or interpret texts – including their knowledge of language, representations of the natural and social worlds they inhabit, values, beliefs, assumptions, and so on.

Because I was once a member of the discourse community of LSTs I was able to relate the LSTs’ accounts to those “interpretive procedures” (p. 141) or MRs. For as Fairclough argues

The analyst must draw upon her own MR (interpretative procedures) in order to explain how participants draw

upon theirs. The analysis of discourse processes is necessarily an 'insider's' or a 'member's' task (p. 167).

By drawing on my 'insider' knowledge, my MR, I was able to identify specific discourses such as the reading curriculum, dyslexia, assessment, reading pedagogy and reading standards. I also used my knowledge and membership of wider social groups and cultures to identify discourses such as parenthood, marginalisation and difference which were evident in the LSTs' accounts. Analysis of the linguistic devices and resources which the LSTs used, and of the functions which these resources served, further enhanced the identification of specific discourses. For example, analysis of the LSTs' accounts showed that they drew on the discourse of advocacy to present themselves as caring professionals who believed they had a missionary-like zeal and responsibility to equip their pupils for survival in a 'literate' society. They used rhetorical devices to make their positions persuasive, to ward off potential criticism and to produce particular positive identities for themselves.

The identification of specific discourses such as those mentioned above closely matched the identification of the themes outlined in chapters four, five and six. I immersed myself in the data by constantly re-reading the transcripts. The emergence of patterns or themes coincided with the identification of specific discourses. I constructed tentative hypotheses regarding the functions of various features of specific discourses and kept checking these against the data (Gill, 1996, p. 146; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). I conducted a review of the literature as each new theme and discourse pattern emerged to ensure that the findings were located in a solid theoretical context and background. This process was deemed to be the most appropriate way of addressing the research questions. To summarise therefore, the interviews were firstly examined as textual data from which themes, relevant to the research questions, could be identified. As the themes emerged, research literature relevant to these key themes was consulted. The interviews were also regarded as problematic discourse, jointly constructed, through language, by the narrators and the researcher. Using a combination of critical language study (Fairclough, 1989; 1992; Ivanic, 1998), and discourse analysis within a constructivist approach (Gee,

1999; Coyle, 2000; Block, 1999; Potter and Wetherell, 1987) the data shed light on the social construction of LSTs' identity and work. Although I drew on each of these approaches simultaneously in an integrated fashion, I explain each broad approach separately below to highlight the move from the concrete data to the generalisations and findings presented in the next four chapters.

Drawing on a grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Pidgeon, 1996; Pidgeon and Henwood, 1996), analysis and interpretation of the data were carried out simultaneously. Maykut and Morehouse's (1994) constant comparison method was used as a guide. Every effort was made to be as systematic and self-consciously critical as possible. That is, much re-reading of the transcripts, listening to the tapes over and over again, checking and re-reading the discussion notes and documentary evidence allowed themes and patterns to emerge directly from the data. These themes were marked and labelled in the margins of the transcripts using Taylor and Bogdan's discovery method (cited in Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). As each new theme emerged, it was entered on a separate page and cross-referenced to the relevant teacher dialogue. To get an overall view of the emerging patterns, the data were entered onto tabular frames (see appendix D). Thus, a visual record of the emerging themes was created. This iterative and inductive approach, while time-consuming, allowed a set of patterns to emerge which shed light on what it means to be a LST. Time was spent reflecting on these themes – sometimes they changed and developed further as unanticipated themes emerged; at other times they remained the same until I felt that saturation point had been reached by about the eighth and ninth interview, as no new insights seemed to be forthcoming. Interviews were only concluded when the narrators were satisfied that they had no more to say for as Erben (1998, p. 6) says

The appropriate amount of data gained through the interview will be determined *both* by the respondents feeling they have made all the observations they feel necessary *and* the researcher ceasing to observe novel cues.

There was a time lapse between each interview, which enhanced this reflection on the themes and aided progressive focusing. The insights gained from this process were used in subsequent interviews. For example when the theme of parenthood emerged as a significant identifier of selfhood for the first few women LSTs interviewed, (all mothers) it was decided to seek out fathers so as to see if this theme extended across gender and check whether or not it was a significant factor in LSTs' perception of themselves. The data that emerged were plausible and credible to me as a researcher and as a former LST. By supplying thick descriptions of their accounts in the findings chapters, it is hoped that readers involved in education will also find the LSTs' accounts plausible and credible.

As the themes emerged, the research literature was searched and consulted. This ensured that the move from identification to analysis and discussion of the themes was guided and enhanced by the relevant research literature (Hammersley, 2001). The more I read and reflected, the more convinced I became that the chosen themes lent themselves to serious analysis and theorising supported by the literature. Particular concepts and frameworks in the literature relating to the various themes were extremely useful in helping me gain a greater understanding of the relationship between theory and practice and specifically of the LSTs' work and identities. In particular, the literature offered valuable insights into how LSTs' individual accounts of themselves and their work relate to the practice of LS teaching in general. The literature confirmed the possibility of the selected themes contributing to answering the research questions posed in chapter one. In this way, a small number of significant and recurring themes was distilled by a simultaneous, dual process of consulting the research literature as well as systematic progressive focussing on the concrete interview data.

According to Potter (1996, p. 140) engaging in discourse analysis is a "craft skill" which is difficult to describe and which is best learned by doing. However, Potter and Wetherell's advice (1987, cited in Coyle, 2000, p. 257) to suspend belief "in what is normally taken for granted in language use" was taken as a starting point. Hence the LSTs' use of language was examined in its own right as a social process and as a key to understanding

why and how they operated as they said they did. The interview transcripts were analysed to see how the LSTs constructed their accounts and to examine what functions these accounts performed. The analysis was concerned with the “action orientation” of their discourse (Gill, 1996; Potter, 1996). That is, their language was analysed to see how they used discourse to do things. The LSTs used language to perform functions – to present themselves in a particular light, to distinguish themselves from others, to take up particular subject positions, to affiliate themselves with the professional group of LSTs. Consequently, both the content of their talk, or in Halliday’s (1978) terminology the ‘ideational component’ of their interview accounts, and the manner in which the LSTs used language, which Fairclough (1989; 1992) calls ‘discourse’, were examined. Because the study is concerned with the identity and practices of LSTs, the analysis included an examination of how language was “used to enact social and cultural perspectives and identities” (Gee, 1999, p. 10).

Following the immersion in the data and the emergence and coding of the initial themes, described above, analysis moved to an interrogation of the assumptions that led to the identification of those themes. This entailed investigating the function of specific sections of discourse and checking these against the data. In an effort to develop an “analytical mentality” (Potter, 1996, p. 140) care was taken to be sensitive to the way language was used and to the contexts in which it was used during the interviews. The inferential aspects of the LSTs’ talk as well as the communicative interaction throughout the interviews were examined. Linguistic evidence was sought as recurring discourse patterns were identified. For example, by examining the vocabulary, the specialist terminology and the metaphors used by the LSTs, it was possible to hypothesise about which particular discourses were being invoked. A series of questions based on analytical frameworks in the literature were posed throughout the analysis (Gee, 1999; Fairclough, 1989; Gill, 1996; Block, 1999; Coyle, 2000). These included questions about the LSTs’ “situated meanings” and “cultural models” as expressed in their accounts (Gee, 1999, pp.53; 72). These revealed some of the assumptions and ‘taken-for-granted’ theories and beliefs they held about

themselves and their work as part of the specific social and cultural group of LSTs.

Because of the focus on identity, particular attention was given to the subject positions resisted and adopted by the LSTs. It was possible to analyse their accounts to see how the LSTs responded linguistically to the positions offered to them by the discourse of LS teaching. Describing the dialectical relationship between discourse and subjectivity, Fairclough (1992, p. 45) points out that social subjects are

shaped by discursive practices (and they are also) capable
of reshaping and restructuring these practices.

The data were scrutinised to see if and how the LSTs both constructed and were constructed by the discourse of LS teaching.

Analysis was not confined to the personal and professional discourses in which the LSTs engaged. The transcripts were also scrutinised for evidence of the LSTs' use of public discourses, as when they commented on what Bornat et al (2000, p. 250) call "...a more public, almost therapised, discourse with references to conformity...". Thus the more global context of the social, cultural and political trends associated with LS teaching was also brought to bear on the analysis. An attempt was made to unpack the ideological effect of the language used by the LSTs to describe their work and identity. The rhetorical devices used by the LSTs were analysed in order to pinpoint which versions of 'reality' they were trying to establish over competing versions. Thus, the strategies they used to make their discourse persuasive, to render their positions 'commonsense' or to ward off potential 'criticism' were examined and used to uncover some of the ideologies underpinning LS teaching. In this way the transcripts were analysed to study what Fairclough (1992, p. 4) calls "the social effects of discourse".

There are limitations to the analytical approach used in this study which need to be acknowledged. Coyle (2000, p.266) warns that those
working within the extreme social constructionist tradition
resist the idea of there being any 'reality' beyond
language.

This study retains the notion that as well as constituting 'reality' language also represents things. The combination of grounded theory, consultation with the research literature and discourse analysis in the current study formed a powerful tool for analysing how the LSTs produced and interpreted their identities, their roles and their practices through language. Because the themes were thoroughly grounded in and arose from the data, the tendency to reify discourse was minimised. There are always difficulties with interviews even when, as was the case for this study, every effort is made to make the interviews as open-ended as possible. Although the interviews were regarded as social interactions and joint constructions, they were still guided by the semi-structured interview schedule and entailed a lot of question-answer type discourse rather than a more natural interaction (Potter, 1996; Spradley, 1979). Ultimately, the version presented here is second-hand in that it reflects my interpretation of the LSTs' accounts, rather than their own actual accounts. However, the social constructivist stance adopted throughout this study has never claimed that the LSTs' life-history interviews were an

instrument for accessing a veridical account of something
that happened elsewhere or a set of attitudes and beliefs
(Potter, 1996, pp. 134-135)

Rather, they were an instrument for exploring the LSTs' interpretative perspectives and constructions of themselves and their work. The only safeguard I can offer is to provide as much direct data as possible alongside my interpretations so that the reader can judge whether or not my particular interpretations, at this particular point in time, are justified. Before doing that I now introduce the ten LSTs who participated in the study and present the general issues which they raised.

Chapter Three

Presentation of Narrators and General Issues Raised

This chapter offers a description of the narrators and a summary and explanation of the more general texture of the data. The LSTs in this study are referred to as narrators, at least in the context of discussing the interview data, rather than as informants or interviewees, terms which could be considered more distant and less appropriate for the chosen methodology. Life-history interviews depend upon the willingness of participants to narrate their stories and on the collaborative story-making process between the researcher and the researched. Because the stories and identities created in this study are joint constructions, it is necessary to give some background and contextual information concerning both the narrators and the researcher. So as not to distract from the narrators, who are the proper focus of this chapter, my role and stance, as researcher, are acknowledged and made transparent in chapter two rather than here. Thus, what follows is a selective exemplification of the narrators, whereby specific aspects of their diversity are illustrated by brief particulars of selected LSTs, rather than providing detailed introductions to each of them in turn. (Table 3.1 summarises basic information on each LST). Following the description of the narrators, this chapter then discusses the narrators' styles of presentation during the interviews. This has a bearing on the overarching research question, (what does it mean to be a LST?), because the narrators present their identities through the telling of their stories in the interviews. The chapter then summarises the more general issues raised by the LSTs before setting the scene for the presentation of the findings in the next three chapters.

Presentation of the Narrators

Ten LSTs were interviewed - five female and five male, Vera, Paula, Emily, Ciara, Sarah, Matt, Tony, Colm, Jim and Fred (pseudonyms). In line with the research on LS teaching in Ireland, which shows that only 5% of LSTs are under thirty years of age (Shiel and Morgan, 1998, p. 26), the LSTs in this study fall into the older age profile; at thirty six, Paula is the youngest

and Sarah is the eldest at fifty five years. They each have at least sixteen years teaching experience, with approximately three years as LSTs. Table 3.1 summarises general, background information about the LSTs.

Table 3.1 General information on narrators

Name	Gender	Age	Years teaching	Years as LST	Pupils in school	Pupils attending LST	Type of school
Vera	Female	44	25	3.5	380	40	Boys & girls, urban, disadvantaged status, severe unemployment
Paula	Female	36	16	3.5	800	30	Boys & girls, suburban, lower income-unemployed
Emily	Female	45	25	3.5	400	37	Junior boys & girls, growing satellite commuter town, middle income
Ciara	Female	40	20	3.5	460	52	Senior boys, urban, lower-middle income
Sarah	Female	55	18	4	420	31	Junior boys & girls, suburban, almost full employment
Matt	Male	37	17	3.5	550	44	Senior boys & girls, suburban, lower income-unemployed
Tony	Male	43	20 with some breaks in service	3.5	A*- 200; B – 200+ growing	46	A & B both boys and girls, almost full employment, growing satellite, commuter town
Colm	Male	40	17	5	180	32	Junior boys & girls, suburban, disadvantaged status, severe unemployment
Jim	Male	40	20	3	A*-500; B - 120	37	A & B - Boys & girls, suburban, disadvantaged status, severe unemployment
Fred	Male	46	20	3	A*- 150 B – 98 C – 75 D – 33 E - 20	35	Boys & girls, rural, 2-6 teachers, mixed socio-economic status

*denotes more than one school

The teachers chose different routes into teaching. Six of them (Vera, Paula, Emily, Matt, Ciara and Jim) went straight from school to become primary teachers by studying for a B.Ed degree in Colleges of Education. The remaining four (Tony, Colm, Sarah and Fred) all received B.A.s in university before doing graduate diplomas to become primary teachers. With the exception of Colm, after completing their primary degree, these latter teachers had all worked in areas other than primary teaching. Sarah worked as an airhostess, Tony as a youth leader in third world countries and Fred as a musician and journalist. Of the ten teachers, Vera is the only one who claims she always wanted to be a teacher. Indeed Emily recalls quite bitterly how, against her wishes, the nuns in her secondary school applied for a place for her in Teacher Training College. Apart from Sarah, the LSTs are all married to practising teachers. This may partly explain the seeming lack of separation between their personal and professional lives and identities, which is so much in evidence in their accounts. They all have children of their own ranging in age from newly-born to thirty years.

It is interesting to note that more than half the teachers have taught in the same school since they started their teaching careers. A quick examination of the LSTs' teaching careers reveals that these teachers, now in their early forties, have spanned a time in Irish education when there were few opportunities for movement between schools. Throughout the late seventies and eighties there was an over supply of primary teachers in Ireland. It was difficult for newly qualified teachers to secure permanent teaching positions and in fact many of them pursued alternative careers or were offered teaching jobs in England, particularly in densely populated areas like Brent and Inner London. Those who did get jobs in Ireland tended to stay in their original schools. Due to increased economic prosperity during the last decade, additional teaching posts have been made available to schools and this has resulted in greater mobility of teachers between schools.

Paula, one of the few LSTs in this study who taught in a different school to her present one, recalled, with some nostalgia, "idyllic" lunchtimes in a small two-teacher rural school

where everyone went home for lunch when the men all stopped work at dinnertime(and) afternoon classes were often held outside once the fine weather came.

The others, who had previously taught in other schools, only did so for one or two years at the beginning of their teaching careers. Consequently this means that they were all well-established, long-serving members of staff in their current schools.

The narrators were not the first LST in their schools but had inherited the position from the previous incumbent. Some of them said this was an advantage but others reported feeling under pressure to perform in the same manner as the former LST. Most of the LSTs taught in a single school. Jim and Tony, who taught in two schools each, both reported longing for the day that they could serve as LST in their base-school only. Since the completion of this study Jim now works solely in one school. However Fred, who travels between five small country schools, said he “loved moving from school to school”. He stated that he had greater freedom and autonomy than if he was in a single school. According to Fred, teachers were too quick to criticise the job of shared LST and were unaware of its benefits.

The demography of the schools was quite varied. Colm taught in an area officially designated as disadvantaged. His school was part of a national, early intervention project, *Breaking the Cycle*, aimed at combating educational disadvantage. He described many of the social and economic hardships experienced by his pupils. He revealed that many of the parents of his pupils were unable to read or write and some of them had recently started participating in parenting courses organised by local community groups. In contrast, Tony taught in a new, growing, satellite commuter town which boasted almost full employment. He talked about the high level of educational support his pupils enjoyed from their parents and also of what he sometimes considered “unreasonable and unrealistic demands” placed on him by these parents. There was a wide range of needs in the different schools also. Colm was catering for pupils who scored around the

p10th percentile on nationally standardised tests of reading, while Tony had pupils performing around the 30th and 40th percentile.

The narrators' styles of presentation

The life-history interview allows narrators to use language to construct different versions of their identity. Analysis of the data reveals that the narrators and I, as researcher, used many intertextual devices to present these multiple identities. There were references to voices from their pasts (parents for example), to ideas from books and pedagogical approaches, to phrases used by their own children. The LSTs' accounts show that they drew on various discourses, some connected with their profession, some associated with prominent discourses in society, as well as more private, personal discourses. It was possible to trace much of their accounts back to - elements in their in-service LST course, when they remembered specific examples or practices; to theoretical frameworks from their professional reading or their days as undergraduates of Education, when they discussed various models of teaching reading; to hindsight reflections on changes in education which occurred during their days as pupils, such as the introduction of the "New Curriculum" in 1971. Vera, for example, drew on childhood memories and voices as she recalled one of her earliest teachers who influenced her decision to become a teacher. The following example of interdiscursivity from Vera is typical of the intertextual devices used by the LSTs throughout their accounts.

I can actually see her room now – Sr. Perpetua – she was great. She was way ahead of her time you know. She has really stuck in my mind – always saying "Good girl, good girl, that's great, well done". She had loads of little things – incentives you know – there was a little car thing that every time you did something well the car moved on another space. I have those sort of things now you know – incentives, rewards, things to motivate them – praise them – "good boys – well done".

Voices such as these from the various discourses intermingled and there was often no clear distinction between professional and personal discourses as their biographies unfolded.

Many of the narrators referred to the fact that the interview process enabled them to reflect and form ideas as the process unfolded. Sometimes this process was of a highly practical nature. Sarah, for example, worked out a new approach for teaching a particular child how to break up words into their constituent sounds as she discussed this problem during the interview –

and in a way now – just talking to you here and now – I
think that's it – I must try that on the board with her
tomorrow. (*Sarah*)

At other times they appeared to be using the interview process to formulate their positions on various issues or to understand how past experiences helped construct the sort of LST they are today. Matt talked about the wonderful hours he had spent as a child working in an old shed on the family farm, learning how to build and make things by going through various steps.

I'd learn a lot from steps. You know, I think I must teach
like that too. Well, I never.....that's it....that's how I
teach in remedial. I like that particular way – when I'm
shown a task and I think that you learn an awful lot from
thatgoing in steps....I pulled things apart, and got into
a lot of trouble for it...but I had a lot of freedom as a
kid.....I would have been into that kind of thing. (*Matt*)

The interview afforded him the opportunity of reflecting on this childhood experience and realising the influence it had on his current teaching practice. The other narrators made similar revelations throughout the interview process.

During the interviews I formed the view that all ten narrators were extremely forthcoming and generous in their sharing. Although I used the moderately structured interview schedule as an *aide mémoire*, they needed very little encouragement to expound on various issues. They led the interviews in many instances and I was able to follow their cues. They took the interviews seriously and were anxious to be helpful. They often used phrases like

I'm being totally honest with you here now (or) Is this the
sort of thing you're looking for?

They took time to think and were determined to give of themselves unstintingly during the interviews. So keen were they to contribute faithfully that some of them telephoned me after their interview to clarify specific issues which they felt may have been unclear.

I experienced a bond of friendship and understanding with the LSTs by engaging in this research. I have reason to believe that this feeling was mutual as they all expressed satisfaction and appreciation of the process. The stories we wove engendered a feeling of intimacy and understanding. These narrators, whom I had previously known only on a professional basis, telephoned me to tell me of the birth of their new baby, sought me out for personal chats at various professional gatherings and sent me postcards from their holidays. These examples reiterate the evolution of our relationship. When we meet now, we meet as friends and colleagues, who take up where they last finished, because of the mutual privilege of having been party to the deep sharing afforded by life-history research.

The General Issues Raised in the Interviews

Analysis of the interviews confirms the existence of a discourse of LS teaching. The LSTs all aligned themselves with the profession of LS teaching. They spoke confidently and knowledgeably about their particular work and practices; they regarded themselves as different from class-teachers. The accounts show that these LSTs were aware of the specialised and distinctive nature of their work. They were proud of their specialist knowledge and position within the school, in the world of education and in society generally. They appeared to take pride in their membership of the professional association of LSTs in Ireland (ILSA), a membership which again marked out the distinctiveness of their profession. Their accounts show that they enjoyed a considerable degree of independence and autonomy and appeared to be outside many of the usual restrictions and pressures of class-teaching. They were working with a specific group of pupils; they were teaching reading exclusively; they had no classroom management difficulties; they had specialist training for their job. They used words and phrases like “freedom”, “I’m in charge”, “in control”, “they let me get on with it”, or “I decide” to describe the autonomy they felt.

Throughout the interviews, they drew on the discourse of LS teaching, with its own specific vocabulary and terminology, practices and implicit values, to describe their work and to contrast themselves with the general body of the teaching profession. Overall their accounts show that they had a wealth of shared experiences by virtue of their membership of the discourse of LS teaching.

Throughout the interviews the LSTs persistently invoked a discourse of 'vocation' or what Huberman (1993b, p. 193) calls "levels of activism" or "calling". They used words like "vocation", "calling", "commitment" and "moral responsibility" to describe their identity as LSTs. They reported incidences where they acted as advocates for their pupils' rights and needs. Many of them drew on a language of guilt mixed with a sense of urgency, at times nearing panic, when talking about some pupils' lack of progress. They spoke of the preciousness of their pupils' time and the importance of "not wasting" it because "there is so much to do....to catch up on" (*Jim*). Allied to this sense of vocation was their commitment to the needs of the whole child. Their discussions on how they teach reading were heavily populated with references to the relationship between self-esteem and learning, between self-confidence and success in learning to read.

The overall impression from the transcripts is that these LSTs were happy in and committed to their job. Given the choice, most said they would opt to continue as LSTs for the foreseeable future. Only Fred, Sarah and Tony expressed a desire to leave LS teaching some time in the future and this would only be because they might feel they needed a new challenge, rather than any dissatisfaction with LS teaching. Their accounts show them to be hard-working and confident about their teaching. Their desire to perfect their teaching and to reflect on their practice was a feature that stood out in the data. I was struck by how well these LSTs appeared to know their pupils both on a personal and professional level. The needs of the pupils appeared to drive their teaching.

Despite their stated satisfaction, they all identified difficulties associated with the job. A common difficulty was the pressure they felt to perform

energetically and effectively with each new group of pupils. Three of them used the term “waves of children” to describe their feelings of stress as the next group arrives to be taught. Sarah explains that

there are peaks and valleys in class-teaching and there are spaces during the day. But in remedial there is no let up, you’re teaching a new group every half-hour. (*Sarah*)

Although they were anxious to state that the majority of their colleagues were supportive of their work, one of the major sources of dissatisfaction they reported was the difficult relations they encountered with some class-teachers. Many of them mentioned a sense of isolation and of being misunderstood and unappreciated. This sense of marginalisation seemed to heighten their allegiance to the professional group of LSTs, making them rely all the more on other LSTs. Drawing on a discourse of ‘difference’ they constructed a large part of their identity as LSTs by describing themselves as different from the main body of the teaching profession.

The LST as ‘different’

This theme of *the LST as different* emerged early on in the study.

Continuous re-reading and coding of the transcripts confirmed this theme, and words and phrases relating to difference and distinctiveness were identified and highlighted throughout the accounts of all ten LSTs. The LSTs in this study had a justifiable basis for comparing LS and mainstream class-teaching, as they had all been class-teachers for a considerable number of years before becoming LSTs. They continuously compared both types of teaching, drawing heavily on the language of difference and contrast, to exemplify their claims of difference. All ten said they had chosen to become LSTs because they wanted a “change” from class-teaching. They seemed to be aware before they left class-teaching that they were embarking on something “different”, something that, as Colm said, “had more variety – had the feel of opening doors”. Vera’s comment was typical

I wanted to do something different or needed something different – or em - I felt like moving on. It was really to go a different road – a new challenge. (*Vera*)

The fact that they saw it as a “change” suggests that they saw LS teaching as something different from the work of class-teachers.

The LSTs described obvious differences between LS and class-teaching such as the small groups of pupils whom they withdrew from class as opposed to the large numbers in whole-class teaching and their perception that LS teaching required much more organisation and administrative work than class-teaching. These kinds of differences are relatively transparent to teachers, pupils, parents and anyone involved in education. However, their accounts also showed more subtle differences, which helped construct *LS teaching as a distinctive discourse* amongst the discourses of teaching in general. They spoke of a lack of understanding or awareness on the part of other teachers in their schools of the role and the work of the LST. A number of them reported that they took it upon themselves to educate their colleagues in this regard. Using language like “establish”, “promote” and “win them over”, they appeared anxious to increase awareness of the distinctively different nature of their work. Explaining the policy in her school of rotating the job of LST every six years, Paula said this was a good idea because the LST returning to the classroom acted as the “voice-piece” for LS within the school.

This need for a ‘voice’ amongst the mainstream staff recurred throughout the accounts and highlights their need for recognition and understanding.

As Emily states

Some of them don't know what I'm at. Some of them think I do nothing, I know that. But generally speaking, you know, it's ok. You have to promote yourself. You have to tell them what you're doing and I'm good at that.

(Emily)

My interpretation of this desire to be understood and to explain their work is that they not only perceived their work to be different, but they also needed their colleagues to see it as different.

The LSTs reported positive and negative aspects of this difference between LS and class-teaching. According to the LSTs, by far the biggest advantage of LS over class-teaching was the lack of discipline problems, the relaxed atmosphere and the pleasant working environment for both teacher and pupils. They remembered coping with management and behaviour

problems in the classroom using terms like “frantic” “high-pressure zone” and “haring around like a lunatic”. Fred offered a good summary of their views about LS teaching –

You never have to give out to a child in the slightest. It’s just so relaxed. It’s a pleasant experience. You can have a bit of fun. You can treat them as human beings. (*Fred*)

Allied to this absence of pressure from discipline problems, is the notion of the more ‘effective teacher’. Many of them spoke of their frustration as class-teachers, of not being able to meet the needs of the less able pupils in their class; of teaching to “the middle”, and of having no time to reflect on how best to teach particular pupils or particular aspects of the curriculum. Their accounts demonstrate that these LSTs believed they functioned more effectively, at least for children with learning difficulties, as a LST than as a class-teacher. Describing pedagogical decisions she makes now, in comparison with when she was a class-teacher, Paula said the difference was that

I’m aware that I’ve made a conscious decision. (I have) permission to stay where the child is at, to let the child lead you. (*Paula*)

Whether or not class-teachers would agree with this perception, it adds to the notion that LSTs perceive themselves to be different from, and perhaps more ‘effective’ than, class-teachers.

Part of the discourse of ‘difference’ contributing to the LSTs’ sense of distinctiveness is this *specialised knowledge and expertise*, with respect to pupils with learning difficulties, they feel they have compared with class-teachers. Matt admitted that as a class-teacher he had not really managed to cater for the pupils with learning difficulties

I can honestly say that we’ve never really looked at it that way....how to address the weaker kids in the class.....it’s very difficult. Well you tend to address the middle and those that are coping and those at the bottom so often are left to the mercy of that person who is the remedial teacher. (*Matt*)

This abdication of responsibility for the pupils with learning difficulties possibly adds to the perception that the LST is a different type of teacher who can and should cater for such pupils. Throughout the interviews, the LSTs looked back in hindsight on their days as class-teachers and described their frustration at their inability to cater for the needs of pupils with learning difficulties.

Discourse analysis of the interviews reveals that the LSTs appeared to be aware and proud of being 'different' and 'special'. Colm described how he acquired 'specialist' status when his school received a sudden influx of new, young teachers as a result of a government initiative to combat illiteracy in disadvantaged areas.

All of a sudden I became one of the 'old teachers'. You felt very old. The principal categorised me as the 'specialist teacher', which was nice. (*Colm*)

The addition of "which was nice" shows that Colm appreciated this label. Many of the other LSTs also expressed a sense of pride in this 'special' identity. Jim explained how being a LST changed his perception of being a teacher.

I think before I was a remedial teacher, a learning support teacher, I wouldn't have been proclaiming to the world that I was a teacher – because you know, people's image of a teacherwouldn't have been a very positive one. But now I'm proud of my badge, of my job as a learning support teacher. (*Jim*)

These LSTs appeared to like and took pride in, the 'special' status conferred on them by being part of the discourse of LS teaching.

Being 'special' also appeared to carry the negative connotation of being isolated because they were different. Drawing on a language of *isolation and loneliness*, the LSTs highlighted the lack of co-operation and sharing between LSTs and class-teachers as a source of dissatisfaction when asked about the complexities of LS teaching. Colm summarised this feeling by saying

Sometimes you feel like you're doing it all on your own
and you're the only one working. (*Colm*)

Sarah's comment was typical of those LSTs who had previously enjoyed such co-operation while they were class-teachers -

I think it's the loneliness.....the fact that in our school -
that I'm the only one and you've got nobody else to share.
You see, among corridors, people work on a co-operative
basis. They do notes together and they work together
.....and there is a huge element of co-operation and I
think I really miss that, 'cos I knew that. (*Sarah*)

Their accounts reveal their need for support from other LSTs and many of them talked of how they enjoyed this peer support when they were attending their in-service courses for LSTs. This lack of support appears to be felt at a human, social level as well as at a professional level. Drawing on the language of loss, using words like "loneliness", "cut off", and "isolated", the LSTs represented themselves as marginalised from the main body of teachers.

Analysis of the interviews and of the four group-discussions with the LSTs attending inservice courses shows that part of this isolated identity includes being misunderstood. They used different linguistic devices to construct the identity of the *LST as misunderstood*. Many of them engaged in the language and tone of complaint to describe what they saw as the erroneous and unappreciative perceptions of some of their colleagues regarding the work of the LST. Ciara complained that "Some would feel that it's an easy job or it's a push over". Others used humour to cope with what they saw as lack of awareness or understanding on the part of some of their colleagues. When asked the seemingly innocuous question at the beginning of the interview - how many teachers are in the school?, Emily quipped

Thirteen teachers and two drones – one remedial teacher
and one administrative principal. (*Emily*)

Although she laughed at this image of the principal and LST doing no work because they were not class-teachers, it was a perception that was borne out in many of the comments passed by the other LSTs regarding class-

teachers' attitudes to LSTs. Matt also used humour to portray the same attitude "Well, the joke is that there's nothing going on down here". Vera was dismissive of one colleague who kept forgetting to send his pupils to the LST at the required time, thereby, in Vera's opinion, illustrating his lack of regard for the importance of this work. She dismissed his opinion by saying "Oh.....he's just a young fella – not a clue". Colm reported his anger and frustration with teachers who ignored or changed his plans without consulting him.

For instance, the group come down and there's two different children in the group and you're kind of looking at them and saying 'why are you down here now?' and they say 'oh, the teacher said we could come now and the other two could come later'...and I'm saying 'will I just put up with her (the class-teacher) or will I?'

He reconciles this dilemma for himself by avoiding a confrontation and says

but a lot of the time you're better off to take things a bit easy and things do work out you know. (*Colm*)

Whether they used humour, disdain, complaint or resignation, many of the LSTs incorporated the image of being misunderstood into their identity.

This representation fits well with their perception of themselves as 'different'.

The literature on attitudes to learning disabilities confirms that many people with learning difficulties and those who work with them feel marginalised and excluded (Booth, 1995; Clark et al, 1995). From their accounts, it is possible to understand how the job of LS teaching positions LSTs into feeling and being excluded. A dominant issue, which recurred in all four group-discussions with the LSTs was this notion of being excluded. They spoke of how they were often not regarded as teachers by auxiliary staff or pupils; how they were excluded when messages intended "for all the teachers" were being sent around the school; how the physical location of their room, sometimes in a building or pre-fab separate from the school, isolated them and their pupils further. Due to working in a mainstream school, the LST is often the only teacher in that school working in a way that is different from class-teachers. Thus, they differ from teachers who

work in segregated special school settings, who have a network of colleagues, on whom they can draw for support. Without such structural and human supports, it is easy to see how LSTs might feel excluded.

The discourse of LS teaching appears to isolate LSTs on the one hand and elevate them to some sort of elite 'special' status on the other. These LSTs are teaching a group of the school population who themselves are often regarded and treated negatively as marginalised, and positively as special. It could be argued that this ambivalent status of the LST is a mirror-image of the ambivalent status of the pupils they teach. The literature on disabilities highlights ignorance, fear and lack of awareness or experience as the key reasons for the marginalisation and exclusion of people with disabilities in society (Clough, 1998; Clark et al, 1995). Like prejudice, such feelings and attitudes are embedded in the concept of difference. It is therefore interesting that LSTs, in parallel with pupils who are 'different' because they have learning difficulties, perceive themselves and feel that others perceive them to be 'different'.

The LSTs' accounts show that they have constructed a number of identities for themselves, while at the same time, a number of identities have been created for them, which centre on this concept of 'difference'. From the earliest stages in this study, progressive focussing and hypothesis testing facilitated the emergence of the notion that LSTs are 'different'. This overarching image sets the scene for presenting three strong themes which emerged from the data – the craft-knowledge of LSTs; the LSTs' perceptions of their role as teachers of reading; and LSTs' experience of parenthood. These themes, which are outlined in the next three chapters, are detailed exemplifications of this overriding theme of 'difference'.

Chapter Four

The Craft Knowledge of Learning Support Teachers

As explained in chapters one and two, the grounded nature of the research approach and analysis precluded detailed preliminary literature reviews of issues that might possibly have arisen throughout the interviews. Instead the relevant literatures were consulted as key themes emerged from the data. This was a rewarding exercise as the concepts and frameworks contained in the literature were extremely useful for analysing the LSTs' work and identity. The next three chapters, therefore, begin with free-standing, thematic literature reviews. These are followed by the presentation and analysis of findings drawing on the analytic frameworks constructed in the literature reviews. The present chapter is concerned with what the literature calls the craft knowledge of teachers, a theme which was distilled from the data as the interviews progressed. As a former teacher I quickly recognised this craft knowledge – that is, the LSTs' frequent references to the intuitive, experiential and professional elements of classroom life that recurred throughout their accounts of their teaching.

Review of the Literature

The notion that being a teacher is intimately connected with being a person is a persistent theme in the literature on teachers' lives (Kelchtermans, 1993; Elbaz, 1990). Nias (1989, p. 202) demonstrates in her longitudinal study of primary teachers' lives and work that teachers are not easily separated from their craft. According to Nias

...the self is a crucial element in the way teachers
themselves construe the nature of their job (p. 13).

Teachers' personal identities and the work they do appear to be inextricably linked. It is therefore appropriate that the current study should investigate the craft knowledge of teachers – that is,

the professional knowledge and thought which teachers
use in their day-to-day classroom teaching, knowledge
which is not generally made explicit by teachers and

which teachers are not likely always to be conscious of using (Brown and McIntyre, 1993, p. 19).

The growth in biographical educational research highlights the interest in the personal dimension in teaching. There is now a considerable body of research on teachers' life-histories (Conway, 2000; Ball and Goodson, 1985; Goodson, 1992; Day et al, 1993), on the life-cycles and stages through which teachers pass (Huberman, 1993b; Sikes et al, 1985; Kompf, 1993) and on many other personal aspects of teachers' lives and work. Although these studies focus on different facets of the teacher and teaching, they all hold in common an interest in the person of the teacher. As an investigation of teachers' identity and work, the current study shares in that tradition.

The study focuses on teachers' craft knowledge and does not formally address other forms of teachers' knowledge, such as those acquired through pre-service and in-service professional development or through their reading of the literature. It is on craft knowledge that teachers seem to most often rely when faced with the complexities of teaching on a daily basis (Brown and McIntyre, 1993; Batten, 1993; Hansen-Nelson, 1993; Schon, 1983). Coldron and Smith (1999, p. 722) argue that "certain craft skills seem fundamental" to teaching and to teachers. Although it would be foolish to ignore the richness and value of other kinds of knowledge and theorising which teachers can learn from research and from "outside" non-practitioners, according to Wideen et al (1996, p. 191)

little research evidence exists to suggest that formal knowledge generated by outsiders can or will be applied readily by teachers.

If this is true, and my experience of working with teachers suggests it is, the study of teachers' craft knowledge is both justified and necessary.

Teachers' professional self-esteem is closely linked to the skills associated with craft knowledge. Most teachers will testify to their lack of confidence and to the erosion of their self-esteem when faced with their inability to successfully 'manage' a lesson or a group of 'unruly pupils'. For as Coldron and Smith (1999, p. 714) say

part of the experience of teaching is continually constructing a sustainable identity as a teacher.

Teachers are constantly engaged in constructing themselves as teachers; in being seen as teachers by themselves, their pupils and their colleagues; it is a matter of acquiring and then redefining an identity that is socially legitimated (p. 712).

One of the central ways that teachers construct themselves as teachers is through their craft work, through their knowledge-in-action. This study investigates LSTs' accounts of their craft knowledge by asking them to tell the story of their lives and work. A study of their craft is a study of their identity.

The difficulties involved in defining craft knowledge highlight the perennial conflict that appears to exist between theory and practice in education.

Much educational research uses a psychological model which regards as negative many of the intrinsic features of craft knowledge, such as intuition, tacitness and non-linearity (Pope, 1993; Elbaz, 1990). According to Elbaz (1990, p. 21), researchers tend to subject virtually every aspect of teaching to

some form of labelling that empties the teaching act of any personal significance.

So while researchers talk of teacher effectiveness, classroom management and individualised instruction, teachers talk of individual children and specific examples and activities. It is because it is so context-specific that craft knowledge is difficult to articulate and categorise (Turner-Bisset, 1999; Calderhead, 1993). Brown and McIntyre (1993) outline some of the difficulties involved in documenting teachers' craft knowledge. Because experienced, 'expert' teachers have incorporated many practical routines and actions into their repertoires of teaching, they tend to be unaware of those very practices that ensure the smooth running of their work in classrooms; a lot of what happens in classrooms may appear to be quite automatic and obvious to them and so when teachers discuss their work they tend to talk about unusual or atypical behaviours; because they are rarely asked to articulate these ordinary, but highly skilled, practices, teachers generally do not possess the terminology or discourse with which to describe their craft knowledge. Talking of teacher educators, although the same sentiments apply to teachers, Calderhead (1993, p. 12) argues that

although they may have an intuitive understanding of good practice, they are hampered in the defence of their work by the absence of any coherent theoretical account, or even precise language for describing what they do.

However, if the nature of teaching is to be fully understood some explanation and examination of teachers' craft knowledge is necessary. The difficulty lies in both the teachers' inability to articulate it and in the researchers' inability to document it accurately and faithfully. As Elbaz (1990, p. 19) warns,

...while knowledge must be made explicit if the teachers' voice is to be heard, we thus risk turning teachers' knowledge into researchers' knowledge, colonising it and thus silencing the voice of the teacher.

In an attempt to articulate the tacit, by quoting directly from their accounts of their work practices and beliefs about teaching, the current study uses life-history interviews as a vehicle for articulating LSTs' craft knowledge.

Although the literature offers no universally-accepted definition of it, there is general consensus about certain characteristics of craft knowledge. One recurring feature pertains to the tacit nature of craft knowledge mentioned above (Schon, 1983; Pope, 1993; Turner-Bisset, 1999). Tacitness by its very nature pinpoints the difficulty faced by both teachers and researchers in their attempts to articulate the sense-making processes by which teachers become teachers through their work. There also appears to be agreement on the notion that craft knowledge, acquired through practice and apprenticeship, improves with experience and time (Lortie, 1975; from Zeichner, 1983, Calderhead, 1993; Nias, 1989; Coldron and Smith, 1999). Various called practitioner knowledge, practical professionalism, knowing-in-action, personal practical knowledge, or clinical knowledge, craft knowledge owes much to Schulman's (1986) 'pedagogical content knowledge', which refers to teachers' knowledge of how to teach the subject matter or content of teaching. It is an amalgam of content and pedagogy which is strictly the preserve of teachers and which, according to Goodson and Hargreaves (1996, p.6) "distinguishes experts from novices in the classroom".

From their in-depth study of sixteen teachers' accounts of their teaching, Brown and McIntyre (1993) offer a framework for documenting the professional craft knowledge of teaching. In accordance with their description of craft knowledge quoted before, they define craft knowledge as

..that part of their professional knowledge which teachers acquire primarily through their practical experience in the classroom rather than their formal training, which guides their day-to-day actions in classrooms, which is for the most part not articulated in words and which is brought to bear spontaneously, routinely and sometimes unconsciously on their teaching (p. 17).

This description is useful for the current study as it manages to encapsulate many of the key characteristics highlighted by the literature – such as the situated, intuitive, non-linear, creative, spontaneous qualities implicit in the concept of craft knowledge.

The concept of teaching as a craft is persistent throughout the many traditional and varied ways of thinking about teachers' knowledge and work. Calderhead (1993, p. 13) outlines the "traditional craft paradigm" as one his four paradigms of teacher education; Goodson and Hargreaves, (1996, p. 11) include "practical professionalism", a term they apply to teachers' craft knowledge-in-action, in their five discourses on teacher professionalism and professionalization. The traditional, commonsense understanding of craft stems from the concept of expert craftsmen and women, affiliated to a guild, having acquired their specialist craft through apprenticeship and experience. This popular image of craft also encapsulates the concept of teaching as an art. There are many references to "teaching as a creative act" (Turner-Bisset, 1999, p. 52); teaching "as a craft, and sometimes as an art" (Nias, 1989, p. 201); Woods (1987, p. 142) talks of teachers as "creative artists" and of their

art or craft, (as) the secret of their professionalism, the basis of their 'educational connoisseurship'.

A more recent development of craft knowledge has been the shift towards thinking of teachers as professionals (Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996; Kompf et al, 1996; Coldron and Smith, 1999). Claiming that

Professionalism is a social construct that has changed dramatically over time,

Gitlin and Labaree (1996, p.89) build their conception of teacher professionalism on the notion of craft. The recent enactment of a teachers' council in Ireland reflects this concept of professionalism as a craft whereby teachers' work may be certified by their peers, as is currently the case in the USA (The National Board of Professional Teaching Standards), the UK (The General Teaching Council) and Australia (The Council of Teachers). The recommendation to extend the current three year B.Ed degree for Irish pre-service student-teachers to four years, so as to allow more time for working alongside experienced teachers in schools, is another example of the apprenticeship notion which is implicit in the understanding of teaching as a craft.

An important feature embedded in the notion of craft knowledge is the concept of the reflective practitioner, particularly as outlined by Schon (1983). Although he does not use the term craft knowledge or refer specifically to teaching, Schon describes just such knowledge as a spontaneous, intuitive, 'know-how' or 'knowing-in-action' which is essential for the exercise of professional judgement. Distinguishing between 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action', he claims that expert practitioners marry the two and do not separate thinking from doing. It is a reflection which is integrated into practice – professional action is developed through reflection-in-action. Indeed it is reflection-in and reflection-on-action that guards against practice becoming boring, over repetitive or as Schon puts it, 'over-learned'. Coldron and Smith (1999, p. 716) take Schon's view of the craft of teaching whereby

Professional practice involves fine judgements about contextual factors, continual monitoring, and some form of thinking in action.

This is the type of reflection that is central to the notion of the teacher as a professional. It is at the heart of the teacher-as-researcher movement and

when it is understood in the context of craft knowledge it offers a powerful tool for improving the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. It is a potent union of theory and practice.

Some of the more recent thinking however, highlights a narrower, more impoverished version of craft knowledge than that outlined so far. This pejorative version of craft knowledge is reflected in the instrumentalist, reductive approach to teaching inherent in many of the competency-based models of instruction, curriculum and assessment especially prevalent in England and Wales today. (For examples see the National Curriculum and National testing documentation, the statements of competence or standards required of newly qualified teachers, and the demands of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, all of which are framed in prescriptive lists of competence or standards). This happens when craft knowledge is reduced to sets of technical competencies and skills. The assumptions implicit in terminology such as 'training', 'trainees', 'targets', 'statements of competence' reflect a narrow behaviouristic view of teachers as low-status technicians, implementing a 'means-end' curriculum which they do not own. It is totally contrary to the notion of reflective teaching-in-action which is embedded in the concept of craft knowledge adopted by the current study.

Fortunately, much of the current research literature acts as a counter movement to this reductionist, transmission-based model of teaching and teacher knowledge (Turner-Bisset, 1999; Coldron and Smith, 1999; Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996; Calderhead, 1994; Clandinin and Connelly, 1987). Mirroring the general shift from traditional positivism in educational research and thinking, Wideen et al (1996) situate craft knowledge in an interpretive and constructivist conception of teacher knowledge. Regarding all knowledge as problematic, they describe teacher knowledge as

...being actively constructed within the unstable, uncertain, conflict-filled world of practice. The resulting knowledge is idiosyncratic, situated knowledge, made powerful by the contexts in which it is acquired and used (p. 191).

This idea of craft knowledge as situated, actively developed and used by the user is echoed throughout the literature. Indeed, Turner-Bisset's (1999) model of knowledge bases for teaching is a development of Schulman's pedagogical content knowledge into just such a constructivist view of teaching and learning. Craft knowledge at its best involves fine judgements which differ according to situational and contextual considerations and is based on serious reflection-in-practice and reflection-on-practice.

The concept of craft knowledge is not without other potential dangers. Goodson and Hargreaves (1996) voice a note of caution which is far more worrying than the fear of a narrow, technical-based craft knowledge devoid of any thought or reflection (because history has shown that it is not unreasonable to assume that enough teachers will always hold out against these constraining positions). Having extolled the practical and critical virtues of practical professionalism, Goodson and Hargreaves (1996, pp. 12-14) warn against a more extreme personal and romantic form which craft knowledge can sometimes take – a self-indulgent type of 'craft knowledge' which has the potential to turn practical knowledge into what they call "parochial knowledge". They, like Weber and Mitchell, (1995; 1999) argue that many damaging archetypal images of teaching, such as gender stereotyping or immature childhood misconceptions of the ideal teacher remain unexamined, thus redirecting

teachers' work away from broader moral and social projects and commitments (p. 13).

Teachers cannot deny their moral responsibility in making informed, professional judgements about the children with whom they work, the curriculum they teach and the cultural, social and ideological beliefs and values they seek to reproduce.

Perhaps the best way to avoid the twin dilemmas of reducing craft knowledge to a set of technical skills and becoming so insular and self-sufficient as to ignore the effects of damaging ideologies, is to nurture the reflective component embedded in the purest interpretation of craft knowledge. Schon's (1983, p.68) model of the reflective practitioner

combines both the theoretical and practical elements essential to a true understanding of craft knowledge –

When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context.....He does not separate thinking from doing.....Because his experimenting is a kind of action, implementation is built into his inquiry.

Such a welding of thought and action legitimises and values teachers' craft knowledge, highlighting it as an essential area of educational study.

An overriding purpose of this study is to contribute to the development of educational policy and practice with regard to teachers in general and to LSTs in particular. The investigation of teachers' craft knowledge offers such a possibility because it focuses on an understanding of the very nature of teaching. The life-history approach adopted in this study seeks to understand how teachers themselves make sense of the work they do. Without their accounts and interpretations any examination of teaching would be impoverished and limited. Teachers' craft knowledge deserves recognition in its own right. As Nias (1989, p.201) says

Observers who wish to discern the beauty and the skill inherent in the work of successful teachers must first learn something of what it is they do.

In the effort to learn what it is they do attention now turns to the LSTs' accounts of their craft knowledge in action.

Presentation and Analysis of Findings

Many re-readings of the transcripts, paying careful attention to the language used by the LSTs, revealed the recurring pattern of the concept of craft knowledge discussed above. The LSTs drew on various linguistic devices throughout their interviews to construct an identity for themselves as 'knowers of their craft'. Their accounts show them to be teachers who had gone through an apprenticeship, who were experienced in their craft, who strove, like artists, to perfect it and who drew on the wealth of knowledge and expertise available to their profession. Discourse analysis of their accounts reveals how they positioned themselves, and were positioned by the discourse of LS teaching, into taking up the role of expert craftspeople.

Brown and McIntyre's (1993, p. 17) definition of craft knowledge, already quoted, fits well with the LSTs' accounts of their practice and identity. This definition, with its emphasis on teachers acquiring professional knowledge through practical experience rather than formal training, raises the question of the status of teacher education programmes, particularly of the in-service education course attended by the LSTs in this study. While craft knowledge is an essential part of a teacher's repertoire, it is not the only knowledge, belief-system or practice upon which teachers draw. However, because it emerged strongly from their accounts, it is with craft knowledge that this study is concerned. What stands out in the accounts of these LSTs is the level of craft knowledge they appear to possess and the amount of references they make to drawing upon it throughout their teaching. Implicit in the literature cited above, is the notion that craft knowledge only becomes part of teachers' repertoires once they have gained a certain amount of teaching experience. The LSTs in this study had considerable experience of teaching both in terms of years and range, having been class-teachers as well as LSTs. Craft knowledge should therefore have relevance for in-service rather than pre-service programmes for teachers.

The situated nature of craft knowledge

A defining feature of craft-knowledge is that it is grounded in the everyday practicalities of teaching in the classroom (Turner-Bisset, 1999; Coldron and Smith, 1999; Brown and McIntyre, 1993). In this study, LSTs' craft knowledge was most readily identifiable when they spoke of their experience of "what works". Using phrases such as "tried and tested", "bottom-line" and "in the end of the day", they described their work in specifically practical terms, drawing on a 'no-nonsense', 'voice of experience' discourse. In discussing the commonly held notion that teachers generally are not interested in theory and abstractions, Fred commented

.....and I think some of their suspicion of theory is well founded in that there can be all these castles in the air...you know... they measure everything against practice and they're right to do that, because "will it work in the classroom?" is, in one sense....it can be a limiting

question because you're presuming the end, that you're....but in another sense – it's the fundamental question. (*Fred*)

This quotation exemplifies what Day (1993) and Pope (1993) call the situatedness of teachers' knowledge. The LSTs' accounts show that their craft knowledge was based on the concrete, situated, 'here-and-now' context of everyday classroom life and experience. Fred believed teachers were "right" to "measure everything against practice", and to ask "will it work?" Like Fred, the others reported that because they were constantly interacting with their pupils in a very immediate way, they were forced to respond immediately and in ways they felt were the most effective at that moment. They used this grounded, craft element of their professional culture to construct part of their identity as LSTs. They described various incidents which revealed their reliance on their intuitive craft knowledge. For example, Paula explained how she knew, without recourse to "reading ages and all that sort of stuff", how to match books to her pupils' reading ability and interest level. Her comment "and all that sort of stuff", implies a dismissal of theory in favour of her more reliable craft knowledge. Colm described his approach to teaching –

I'm always trying to do what's right for the child at the timethe needs of the child.....I have this intuitive feel for the right time for particular children. (*Colm*)

Constantly modifying her teaching according to her observations of how the child is learning, Ciara explained how she brought her craft knowledge to bear on her diagnostic approach to teaching.

A lot of it would be my own feeling about the child. I take quick notes...how I feel he's been doing. I'd do a lot of informal kinds of tests myself....say, at certain points in my teaching...I'd like to know have they learned what I've been teaching....how well that's been done. (*Ciara*)

The language of 'feelings' and intuition, exemplified here in Ciara's comment, was strong throughout the LSTs' accounts of their craft

knowledge. They talked of “knowing it in my gut”, “having a sixth sense” and of “following my instinct”, thereby displaying a level of confidence in their craft knowledge over any formal, theoretical pedagogy they also possessed. Colm’s use of the word “intuitive” is telling in the context of a discussion of craft knowledge and it sits well with Brown and McIntyre’s definition of such knowledge being

brought to bear spontaneously, routinely and sometimes
unconsciously on their teaching (1993, p. 17).

Discursive strategies used to display craft knowledge

One of the main discursive strategies the LSTs used in the interviews to display their craft knowledge was to position themselves as *expert teachers* who possessed knowledge and experience available to them by virtue of being LSTs. Part of the construction of their identity as ‘experts’ appears to stem from the perception the LSTs had of themselves as different from class-teachers, as having specialised knowledge and expertise with respect to pupils with learning difficulties which they had not previously possessed as class-teachers. This fits well with the overarching theme of difference discussed in the previous chapter. Their accounts show that the LSTs perceived themselves as a distinctive group within the teaching profession. Historically, there was an air of mystique and mystery about teachers of pupils with special educational needs. A commonsense notion that still prevails is that these teachers and the segregated special school system possess specialised knowledge and ways of working which are inaccessible to mainstream class-teachers. With the movement towards inclusive education and the decline in segregated special education systems, many of these notions are being exposed as myths, or at least as being only partially true (Dessent, 1987; Westwood, 1997, 3rd edn). The ways in which the LSTs represented themselves and understood their work is constructed historically and culturally through discourse. The discourse of LS teaching has positioned them into the role of bearing exclusive knowledge of children with learning difficulties, while at the same time they appeared to respond by taking up this ‘expert’ subject position. They are both created by and creators of ‘the expert’ discourse.

Thus, part of the identity the LSTs constructed for themselves, through the language they used in the interviews, was that they were teachers with specialist knowledge and a specialised way of working. This again positioned them as ‘different’ from their mainstream colleagues. They explained how they often acted as a resource to class-teachers, thereby fulfilling the role of *recognised expert*, in their schools. Jim’s description was typical of their accounts.

I would have done model classes for the teachers – I would have set up the system (a particular commercial kit for teaching reading and writing) and got it off the ground and then it was actually up and running for those teacherssay, those teachers wouldn’t have used it before. Now they’re expected to launch it themselves in the final term ...from now on...but I would have initiated that. (*Jim*)

In similar vein Vera and Sarah explained how they inducted class-teachers into whole-school, paired reading programmes. Many of the LSTs attributed part of their expertise to the fact that they had had *specialised training* in LS teaching, which they felt gave them knowledge which class-teachers did not have. Talking about specific difficulties he had encountered with one class-teacher, Matt said

If I hadn’t gone and done the remedial course I wouldn’t have been able to put my end of the story overbecause the arguments for and against would be academic.....like holding your end up in an argument over something like withdrawing children from class. The whole area of testing... I wouldn’t put myself down as a know-it-all but when teachers are talking to me I’d know enough.....NRITs, MICRAs, Drumcondras (names of tests).... and they wouldn’t know much about these tests. (*Matt*)

Matt’s confidence, stemming from his expert knowledge of tests, is countered by his humble assertion “I wouldn’t put myself down as a know-it-all”, which gives all the more credibility to his powerful position as a

‘different’ type of teacher with specialised knowledge unavailable to his class-teaching colleagues.

The transcripts show that because they worked with pupils who have learning difficulties, the LSTs believed they were working with a *different kind of pupil* and this required a different type of expertise from class-teachers. Vera outlined this difference faced by all the LSTs interviewed.

Well I would say my teaching has improved....getting to know the children individually, em, you know, working individually and you had to...you have to....having to be so specific about everything and having to break things down....that.....and go at a slower pace and you know, find different ways of doing everything. (*Vera*)

Vera’s assertion that her teaching has improved as a result of her experience as a LST and her specific examples of how this has happened (“working individually”, being “specific”, “having to break things down”, going at a “slower pace” and finding “different ways of doing everything”), further strengthens the LSTs’ perception of themselves as bearers of specialised knowledge. According to their descriptions of their daily teaching, they were constantly grappling with the very real challenge of finding ways of teaching pupils who had failed to learn to read in the mainstream class. They reported that because of the nature of their pupils’ difficulties, they were confronted with the complexities and processes at the heart of learning, something that they had not had to deal with, as class-teachers, when they were teaching pupils who did not have learning difficulties. The transcripts show that the LSTs were constantly searching for the most appropriate method of reaching individual pupils, as Colm’s comment illustrates

The children change you and you change in response to them. Certainly in a remedial setting, if the child is sitting there, not getting anywhere, you have to adapt to get to that child. (*Colm*)

All ten LSTs used words like “grapple with”, “puzzle over”, “struggle”, “I say to myself, what else can I do?” to describe their craft-knowledge in action.

Reinforcing the distinctive nature of their positions, the LSTs also drew on the language associated with *specialist teaching methods*. All ten outlined their teaching method as diagnostic or clinical, drawing on the technical language associated with such an approach (Lerner, 2000, 8th edn; Valencia et al, 1994). They explained how they “assessed” each child’s ability and the nature of their learning difficulties, “prioritising their needs”. They then formulated “teaching and learning plans” based on this “diagnosis” and used the child’s “strengths” to teach the child. Arguing that LSTs needed to be much more analytic in their approach to teaching reading than class-teachers, Fred said “You know, it’s the silver bullet rather than the shotgun”. There is an implicit notion in this image that the LSTs’ approach to teaching is different from that of class-teachers.

As well as presenting themselves as specialist in their knowledge of the learning process, of teaching methods and of ways of working, the LSTs also used the interviews to construct themselves as people who had a great amount of knowledge of their pupils. They all spoke in detail about individual pupils, describing their difficulties and how they, as LSTs, sought to teach them. Much of their craft knowledge stemmed from and was substantiated in, their detailed and intimate knowledge of the individual pupils they taught. All ten LSTs gave detailed descriptions of individual pupil’s progress, learning styles and needs. While their written records confirmed these descriptions, their verbal accounts added even more to the extensive knowledge the LSTs had amassed on their pupils. This knowledge was not restricted to the learning needs and abilities of their pupils but also encompassed quite intimate details of their personal and family lives. The teachers outlined details of their pupils’ likes and dislikes, their after-school habits and the activities of their families and friends. They talked about “the whole person”, “quality time”, and the need to develop their pupils’ “self-esteem” and “self confidence”. Thus their accounts demonstrated that the LSTs perceived their role as going beyond ‘school-

based' knowledge of their pupils. Specific examples of their interest in and commitment to their pupils' personal lives and lives out of school informed their construction of themselves as caring over-seers of the whole child.

Craft knowledge as a link between theory and practice

Although the definition of craft knowledge adopted for this analysis (Brown and McIntyre, 1993) emphasises teachers' practical experience and grounded knowledge of teaching, it would be misleading to infer that the LSTs' accounts were devoid of any theoretical and conceptual basis for their teaching. Indeed the transcripts provide plenty of evidence of theoretical reflection on their practice. However, it is not the same sort of theorising found in the academic literature on teaching pedagogy. The data demonstrate that the LSTs reflected deeply about their work albeit in a more practical, situated manner than in the theoretical texts on teaching. They talked constantly about their pupils and their work, both in and out of school. They built theories and abstractions as they pondered over and strove to perfect their craft. Their theorising, while close to Brown and McIntyre's definition, was a further development of that notion of craft knowledge. While they may have appeared on the surface to be concerned only with the technical practicalities of teaching, discourse analysis reveals that they actually reflected all the time. Unlike much of the theorising found in academic texts on teaching, the LSTs used language which reflected a much more holistic view of theory and practice, one which refused to recognise the theory/practice divide, one which was akin to Schon's (1983) view of the reflective practitioner. Confirming the difficulty, cited the literature (Calderhead, 1993; Brown and McIntyre, 1993; Turner-Bisset, 1999), of articulating craft knowledge, the LSTs often struggled to express the philosophical rationale for their beliefs and actions. Fred used the analogy of a jazz musician to describe his reflections on the authoritarian model of teacher.

I would think about these things a lot....for instance, the teacher is there - the authoritarian figure telling what's what and all of that.....or the democratic - the idea that they, you know, the discovery bit. I think about these things. It's a kind of interest of mine, in that I'm a jazz

musician myself and you know in jazz, the composer and the conductor are not remotely important. You have say, five musicians who are playing in a very kind of ordered way but yet it allows for an awful lot of improvisation and they're working together in unison but yet they're all doing their own thing and there's no ...it's a highly democratic art form in that way and that's why I think...say with a class...I think it's more a factor with class-teaching than maybe remedial teaching...how do you want them to walk out the door? Do you want them to line up or want to say "O.K. class dismissed" or "it's time to go now" or whatever? (*Fred*)

Although he did not draw on the theoretical discourse usually associated with an authoritarian style of teaching, his analogy confirms that his teaching is informed by his philosophising about such matters. It is reflection in and on action. Paula also drew on an artistic metaphor when explaining how she would like her pupils to perceive their work.

I'd like them to think of it in terms of colour. I love colour and I love stories. It's just that they'd have a sense of - em - changing and there's colour in things - that it's not all mono....that things vary and they'd look for the bright. I think things can be very black and white for a child whose having trouble and just that it's a lift. (*Paula*)

Throughout the interviews the LSTs created their own discourse of craft knowledge to incorporate their theory and practice of teaching.

The literature often highlights teachers' lack of tolerance for and interest in educational research (Hammersley, 1993b). The evidence from the current study shows that although the LSTs declared a low tolerance of theory and abstraction, their accounts of their practice showed evidence of it. There is a seeming tension, almost a contradiction, in their accounts between their spurning of theory on the one hand and their embracing of it on the other. For example, Colm declared

Theory and practice are completely different. Theory doesn't always work. You try things on good faith...try

them out positively, but you wouldn't know if it was going to work. You have to throw the theory out the window a lot of the time. (*Colm*)

Just before Colm stated that "you have to throw the theory out the window a lot of the time", he described in detail the debt his teaching owed to his Froebel training.

You're not the teacher – you're the gardener, the teacher as gardener. It's the environment that's going to teach the child. That's a lovely idea – I cherish it. I couldn't say I always practise it but I always have this in the back of my mind – but I see it as very important – it's a lovely idea. (*Colm*)

By drawing on this gardening metaphor he clearly demonstrates how this "lovely idea" which he "cherish"(es) and keeps "in the back of (his) mind" informs his everyday teaching. Far from rejecting theory, Colm's description shows how he integrates it into his practice. This is an example of craft knowledge at work, of reflection-in-action.

There were lots of instances in the LSTs' accounts which demonstrated this unity between theory and practice. The LSTs claimed that the position of LST afforded them the privilege of being able to think more about how, why and what they taught. Because of the small numbers of pupils attending each of their classes and because of the lack of discipline problems often associated with class-teaching, they said they reflected much more than they did as class-teachers, again highlighting the difference between class and LS teaching. Emily summed up what a lot of the other LSTs also said.

....but I must say I do not miss that haring around like a mad lunatic that you actually have to do when you have a class. It's hard work here but in a totally different way. There's no discipline problem here. I'm very relaxed here, I don't get excited....I'd be losing my rag in the class. I have time to think about what I'm doing...time to think about the children. (*Emily*)

This “time to think” was a feature noted by all the LSTs and would appear to be part of the distinctive nature of LS teaching. According to Hansen-Nelson (1993, p.154)

reflection is an essential attribute of professionalism
because it contributes to critical pedagogy.

The transcripts show evidence of the LSTs’ reflection which they seem to marry to their pedagogy.

Many elements from the ‘teacher-as-researcher’ movement make the case for grounding research collaboratively with teachers in their own practice through methodologies such as action research and ensuring that there is sustained interactivity between both teachers and researchers (Huberman, 1993a, p. 36; Pope, 1993; Carr, 1993; Kemmis, 1993). The data from this study show that the LSTs are neither technicians nor academic researchers. They are craftspeople. The researcher/teacher paradigm is not applicable. Their accounts display a welding of theory and practice which is recognisable as a craft. Their reflection is borne out in their practice.

Chapter Five

Learning Support Teachers' Perceptions of their Role as Teachers of Reading

It is not surprising that the teaching of reading should have arisen as such a strong theme from the data. A large proportion of each interview was devoted to issues surrounding the narrators' experience of teaching reading. This was partly due to the number of teaching reading related questions on the semi-structured interview schedule, which was informed by the findings from a recent national survey of LS teaching. The findings of this survey showed that the main work of officially-sanctioned LSTs in Ireland was the teaching of English (reading) (Shiel and Morgan, 1998, p. 19). Examination of the transcripts of the current study also reveals that the LSTs spoke predominantly about reading even when this topic was unprompted. The prospective review of the teaching of reading in chapter two served to introduce some of the main concepts from the literature which are now reviewed here in more detail. This is followed by a presentation and analysis of the findings regarding the LSTs' perceptions of their role as teachers of reading.

Review of the Literature

The teaching of reading is an issue which attracts much controversy and debate. Far from being in the sole preserve of education, challenges and opinions, frequently spurred on by the media, emanate from many quarters of society. Depending on the political, historical, social and economic climate of the time, debates range from emotional accusations to reasoned argument. According to Venezky (cited in Gaffney and Anderson, 2000, p. 59)

No other component of the curriculum has been subjected throughout its history to such intense controversy over both its basic methods and its content.

In line with the stance taken throughout and explicitly stated in chapter two, this study uses the concept of discourse as a tool for understanding and reviewing the contested area of the teaching of reading. The teaching of

reading is therefore regarded as a 'discourse' rather than as something that LSTs happen to do.

Gee (2000, p. 197) describes discourses as

...characteristic.....ways of talking and writing about, as well as acting with and toward, people and things....such that certain perspectives and states of affairs come to be taken as "normal" or "natural" and others come to be taken as "deviant" or "marginal".

This review of the literature on the teaching of reading is firmly grounded in Gee's situated, discourse-based, sociocultural view of language and literacy (1994; 1999; 2000). Rather than asking how LSTs teach reading, the study questions what counts as reading for them; what are the assumptions, values and beliefs about the teaching of reading that underpin their pedagogy and reading practices?; what are the characteristic ways of talking about the teaching of reading that have become "natural" or "normal" for them and have, in the process, marginalised other reading practices? How the LSTs define reading and how they choose to teach it are, as Hruby says (2001, p. 59), "the result of both deliberate and tacit social negotiation".

What counts as literacy is socially constructed. For example, schools' literacy practices may reflect a desire to empower individuals to be critically reflective and aware, to equip future citizens for a particular type of work force, or to maintain the values and rules of particular groups in society. Referring to the politics of reading, Shannon (2000) analyses newspaper articles and government administrators' comments on the teaching of reading, questioning the rhetoric of "what works" (for reading instruction) and "what's good" (for children learning to read). He calls for a consideration of whether or not there is consensus about "what works" and "what is good". Just as there is no simple, single, universally-accepted definition of reading, there is an absence of universal agreement about "what works" and "what is good" regarding the teaching of reading. By analysing their life-history accounts, the current study focuses on "what works" and "what is good" for the LSTs in this study. It focuses on how the teaching of reading is socially constructed within the discourse of LS

teaching. Through their choice and handling of texts, pedagogies and assessment instruments, LSTs interpret what counts as literacy for themselves and for their pupils. Their choice of questions, the level of reflection they allow and demand, their interpretation of texts are all mediated by the social, political and cultural contexts in which they operate. The interpretation of their interview accounts is guided by the Vygotskian emphasis on the social basis of learning, language and literacy, on Bruner's view of learning and literacy as a cultural process and on the Bakhtinian dialogic notion that all language is rooted in social relations. This study holds the view that the teaching of reading is embedded in social practice, in social context and in social communities.

A discursual construction of reading defies definition for there is no such single entity as 'reading' – only a variety of 'readings' – a multiplicity of literacies (Ivanic, 1998; Gee, 1999; Stierer and Bloome, 1994; Heath, 1991). Literacy is often unproblematically described by contrasting it with illiteracy. As Florio-Ruane and McVee argue

Definitions of literacy shape our perception of individuals who fall on either side of the standard (what a 'literate' or 'nonliterate' is like) and thus in a deep way affect both the substance and style of educational programs (2000, p. 156).

The ways in which the LSTs in this study define literacy construct and reflect the ways they teach reading. Because literacy is embedded in social context, a fruitful way of interrogating the teaching of reading is by studying the ways in which reading is used. This emphasis on the use of reading reflects a shift from the traditional, cognitivist perception of literacy as a set of skills to the social constructionist notion of literacy practices used for specific social purposes (Hruby, 2001). Building on Barton's (1994) ecological view of literacy, Ivanic (1998, p. 62) argues that

recognisable acts of reading and writing have come to be the way they are because of the social needs and purposes they have evolved to serve.

The teaching of reading cannot be divorced from its social contexts and uses.

Regarding literacy as practices rather than skills places the emphasis on literacy events - activities that are socially and culturally enacted. This broader approach, as evidenced in ethnographic and sociocultural studies of literacy practices, is much more powerful because it views literacy as social activities which differ historically and culturally from settings, contexts and communities (Heath, 1983; Street, 1984; Barton and Padmore, 1994). As Florio-Ruane and McVee (2000, p. 156) state, such ethnographic studies frame literacy as

observable practices, learned and used within communities
and constituent of social and cultural identity

rather than as discrete areas of study in schools or elitist, individual accomplishments. A social view of literacy emphasises the use and meaning-making properties of literacy. Individuals are viewed as users and creators of language and literacy rather than as receivers of pre-ordained skills which eventually lead to universal 'literacy'.

Arguing that language is constantly 'remade' as it is used, Kress (1997, p. xvi) claims that reading should be taught as a meaning-making, active process. In line with emergent literacy theorists such as Hall (1994), Clay (1993) and Teale and Sulzby, (1986) Kress claims that in their attempts to make sense of their environment, children are accomplished readers of signs who display sophisticated familiarity with using written language forms from a very early age. This emphasis on the social purposes of literacy is echoed in what Willinsky (1990) calls the New Literacy. Understanding literacy as a "way of working the world" (p. 6) he calls for a redefinition of "reading and writing as the active pursuit of meaning" (p. 243). 'New literacy' approaches to the teaching of reading and writing are based on an ecological understanding of literacy which focuses on reasons for literacy, contexts in which literacy takes place and communities of readers and writers (Meek, 1988; Graves, 1994; Atwell, 1987).

Introducing the third volume of the *Handbook of Reading Research* Kamil et al (2000, blurb) identify two broad themes which represent a shift in the discourse of reading research and instruction since the publication of the first and second volumes in 1984 and 1991 respectively. These are - a

“broadening of the definition of reading” and a “broadening of the reading research program”. This broadening of the definition of reading is evident not just from a glance at the chapter titles and abstracts of these volumes, but also in the rise of critical and ethnographic approaches to literacy research especially in the last decade (Siegel and Fernandez, 2000; Florio-Ruane and McVee, 2000). This shift is documented in Harrison’s (2000) review of reading research in the United Kingdom over the past forty years where he talks of the current rise of critical discourse analysis and new literacy studies which represent a radical departure from the “limiting and hegemonic” commonsense, traditional definitions of literacy (p. 26). He claims that this new perspective on literacy research can be classified as a branch of cultural studies

with the task of the researcher being to lay bare for analysis both the power relations that make up the landscape of literacy practices within a culture, and the discourses that map them (p. 26).

The current study examines the teaching of reading within the culture and discourse of LS teaching.

Heath (1991, p. 3) argues that rather than possessing literacy skills, the sense of being literate “derives from the ability to exhibit literate behaviours”. She chronicles how

the cognitive and behaviouristic theories that have dominated the Western psychology of learning and thinking and especially their approaches to the teaching of reading and writing, have kept researchers from focusing on the cultural and historical contexts in which individuals of different societies learn (p. 16).

Traditional approaches to the teaching of literacy skills have prized individual performance and displays of critical, rational thinking which conform to the labelling and recalling strategies required by schools. These in turn, reflect the discourses of the dominant, capitalist, powerful elite in Western society. Such an approach does not value, or even admit to, other definitions or displays of literacy such as those born out of oral traditions, community practices and literate activities necessary for the economic,

cultural and social life of many minority groups. Critical literacy approaches investigate how practices of reading and writing teaching work to reproduce the inequalities in our society that grant privileged access and power to some groups over others (Shannon, 1989; Auerbach, 1992; Lankshear, 1993).

Based on the premise that the “words people use reveal the assumptions they make” Gaffney and Anderson (2000, p. 55) carried out a corpus linguistic analysis of articles in major American journals on reading research and instruction. They traced the shift from behaviourism in the 1960s to cognitive approaches in the 1970s to the sociocultural and political perspective of the mid 1980s and 1990s. History demonstrates that language and literacy definitions, uses and practices change in accordance with the social, political and cultural needs of particular times. Debates over ‘top-down’ or ‘bottom-up’ approaches to the teaching of reading, as evidenced in the ‘reading wars’ of the eighties and early nineties, show just how cyclical and contextual the whole area of literacy is (Turner, 1990; 1991; Stierer, 1994; Wray, 1995). As Willinsky points out (1990, p. 68), the competition between models of reading teaching is a historical pattern with different models co-existing, sometimes more happily than others. However, a critical, and particularly discursive, approach to the teaching of reading reveals the ideological embeddedness of all models. All approaches to the teaching of reading are underpinned by implicit or explicit values and assumptions of certain groups in society. Far from being fixed, reading is a social and cultural phenomenon. It is not possible to read or to teach reading in a vacuum. Engaging in literacy practices means engaging in a social context and it is

the characteristics of the social context which shape our language use and which provide its boundaries (Kress, 1997, p. 117).

It is hoped that discourse analysis of their life-history accounts will provide a picture of the social context that shapes and provides boundaries for the teaching of reading within the discourse of LS teaching.

There is no doubt that the teaching of reading is full of taken-for-granted definitions. The very prevalence of definitions which assume such commonsense qualities demonstrates clearly just how ideological the teaching of reading is. Street (1984) proposes an “ideological model” as an alternative to what he terms the “autonomous model” that has dominated Western thinking on literacy so that the assumptions underlying people’s understanding of literacy can be questioned and to open up what is taken for granted about literacy (Street, 1984, p. x). The autonomous model views literacy as a “neutral technology” (p. 65) which assumes a universal understanding of what it means to be literate. Learning to read involves mastering a set of skills which can be cognitively and perceptually processed without reference to the social context, or sometimes even to the textual context, in which they are used. With its emphasis on logic, rationality and individuality, the autonomous model rests on the behaviourist, cognitive paradigm described above. This paradigm has dominated, and in many instances continues to dominate, Western thought and schooling. In contrast, the ideological model concentrates on the

specific social practices of reading and writing
...(recognising) the ideological and therefore culturally
embedded nature of such practices. The model stresses
the significance of the socialisation process in the
construction of the meaning of literacy for participants and
is therefore concerned with the general social institutions
through which this process takes place and not just the
explicit ‘educational’ ones (Street, 1984, p. 2).

The ideological model recognises the diversity and multiplicity of literacies where the survival of particular acts of reading and writing are supported by a large number of social and cultural factors (Ivanic, 1998, p. 62).

This study is concerned with the professional identity of LSTs. As discussed in chapter two, identity is constructed by participation in social practices. Therefore, the study examines the LSTs’ construction of their identities through their accounts of their participation in the discourse practices associated with the teaching of reading. The ways in which they teach reading are imbued with values, beliefs, power relations and

assumptions which exist in the cultural context of LS teaching (Ivanic, 1998, p. 66). The meanings they attach to their practices and experiences are situated and framed by what Gee (2000) calls their “cultural models” –

...the often tacit and taken-for-granted, socioculturally specific “theories” through which people organise and understand their situated experiences of the world and of texts (p. 195)

By examining the LSTs’ situated meanings and cultural models regarding the teaching of reading, this study hopes to gain some insight into the literate discourse and identity of LSTs. The findings with regard to the teaching of reading show that the LSTs constructed a specific identity for themselves as teachers of reading by aligning themselves with particular values and beliefs that can be associated with the culture and discourse of LS teaching. These findings are now discussed.

Presentation and Analysis of Findings

Firstly, their accounts show that the LSTs perceived themselves to be teachers of reading for children who are experiencing difficulties learning to read. Although two of the ten teachers interviewed also taught mathematics, the entire thrust of all the accounts was concentrated on the teaching of reading. Even when they talked about teaching oral language, writing, spelling or other aspects of literacy, it was always in relation to the teaching of reading. An analysis of their description of a typical day and of specific lessons reveals that almost all their time was devoted to the teaching of reading. The bulk of materials and resources observed in their classrooms and discussed throughout the interviews were also concerned with the teaching of reading. A study of their timetables, progress records and teaching plans confirmed this emphasis. When discussing their titles and others’ perceptions of their role in the four group discussions, some of the teachers said they were often called “the reading teacher”. Thus a major part of their identities as teachers was as teachers of reading. This again marks LSTs as different from the main body of primary teachers who would not see themselves exclusively as teachers of reading. The identification of themselves as teachers of reading is linked to the overriding theme,

introduced in chapter three, of the LST as 'different'. Indeed when the LSTs compared their work as class-teachers with that of LST, they spoke of teaching reading as having been just one aspect of their role as class-teacher.

The discourse of teaching reading

Throughout their accounts, the LSTs used language and concepts that are specifically related to the discourse of the teaching of reading. In common with all teachers of reading, they used words and phrases associated with the jargon of teaching reading, such as 'phonics', 'comprehension' and 'word-attack skills'. However, they also drew on vocabulary and concepts used specifically, and more exclusively, by LSTs with regard to the teaching of reading. Such terminology as 'dyslexia', 'remedial programmes' and 'running records', appeared in the accounts of all ten LSTs. This again marked them out as 'different' to mainstream, class-teachers of reading because they engaged in a specialised discourse of difficulties associated with learning to read. They aligned themselves with the community of LS teaching, used the specialised terminology associated with LS teaching and identified themselves as part of that social group. By using this specialised language and by accepting the practices offered to them as LSTs, they both helped create the discourse of LS teaching and were created by it. As Gee (1990, p.131) says, discourse is

a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions and 'artefacts', of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful role.

Drawing on this professional vocabulary, the LSTs used language to represent their beliefs, values and views on the teaching of reading. They identified themselves with the social network of LSTs by engaging in the discourse of LS teaching. Their articulations provide a picture of how the teaching of reading is perceived and practised amongst the professional discourse of LS teaching. They also provide insights into the way LSTs use language to construct and maintain their professional identities, as discussed in chapter two.

By engaging in the discourse of LS teaching, the LSTs adopted and reinforced the theories, values and assumptions embodied in that discourse. In talking about the teaching of reading to children who have difficulties in learning to read, the language they used worked ideologically – that is, it reflected and reinforced their underlying beliefs and assumptions - the values and assumptions implicit in the discourse of LS teaching. Their use of language was a key vehicle for the transmission and exercise of ideology. As Stierer and Bloome (1994, p. 4) argue in their commentary on key terms in the teaching of reading, “the dominant vocabulary in reading pedagogy is ideological”. The LSTs in this study defined and interpreted literacy in particular ways. What follows is an analysis of how they used language to represent their views about the teaching of reading for children who have difficulties in learning to read.

The nature of learning to read

Although the LSTs appeared to use language associated with the teaching of reading in an unproblematic manner, assuming universal understanding and recognition, an analysis of the specialised terminology they used reveals values and assumptions implicit in their thinking about the teaching of reading. For example, many of the LSTs described the reading difficulties experienced by their pupils in terms of a *struggle* or *battle*. They used language like “weak”, “abandoned”, “struggle”, “battle”, “underdog” and “lifers” (as in life imprisonment) to describe how difficult it was for many of their pupils to learn to read. The following quotations were typical of the struggle metaphor used by the LSTs. Vera described two boys

who are *totally lost* in the (mainstream) class. These two now are *absolutely totally lost*. I seem to be *going nowhere* with these two. (Vera)

Jim also described a group of pupils in terms of this struggle.

They’d been *struggling* for three or four years. They’d had no remedial help in 3rd class. They sit in there, feeling *totally abandoned*, feeling they *can’t do anything* and the children with specific reading difficulties

.....literally.....it's *physically a battle* for them. They feel there is something wrong. They feel their friends are able to do it but *they can't*. (Jim)

Such language reveals an understanding of literacy as some prize to be conquered, a goal to be fought for and won. This belief was further confirmed by their expressed view of their role in changing their pupils' perceptions of themselves as "underdogs", to that of winners, capable of achieving the prize of 'reading' and joining the triumphant ranks of the army of 'readers'.

The LSTs also talked of "pushing them on" and "not letting them away with it". This aggressive "stick" approach was countered by their more encouraging "use of the carrot" when they used phrases like "everyone's a winner here", "there are no losers here" and "you set it up so that they'll succeed". The implications of such a view of literacy have significance for how teachers and pupils view themselves and how they act in the classroom. It could mean that part of the LSTs' identity incorporates the stereotypical image of "sergeant major", a term used by Ciara, to describe how she sometimes "pushed" and "pumped the kids". However, it also suggests that the LSTs were aware of their role in inducting their pupils into the literacy practices they would need to survive in the world especially once they had left school. There is a commonsense notion that there exists a body of 'words' or a canon of literacy skills which can be 'known' and is an essential requirement for all pupils. Many of the LSTs described elements of their reading programme using words like "functional", "basic skill" "basic living skills" "survival" and "the most minimal requirements". Although this was particularly true of Vera, Jim, Colm and Matt, who taught in areas officially designated as 'educationally disadvantaged', it was not confined to their accounts. All ten LSTs' accounts revealed what McLaren (1988) terms a 'functional literacy' position, which embodies particular notions of literacy and illiteracy, as judged by the dominant and powerful groups in society, who privilege certain literacies and types of knowledge over others. The LSTs articulated their understanding of 'functional literacy' as competence in

reading a very simple story without it being too cumbersome, without them having to struggle too much with it, as “getting the main idea from a very simple passage”, as “reading the information on the back of a video box” or “reading a simple newspaper”. Matt talked of trying to bring them up to a level that they could cope with the kind of day-to-day paperwork that comes into a house. (*Matt*)

These examples imply that part of their perception of themselves as LSTs, as teachers of reading for children who experience difficulty in learning to read, was that they were people with responsibility for providing their pupils with access to the literacy practices which society viewed as being essential requirements for daily living. By adopting this ‘functional literacy’ position the LSTs were reproducing the social values and cultural norms of the culture in which they and their pupils live. As transmitters of the cultural values and expectations of society, the LSTs in this study spoke of dire consequences for their pupils unless they learned to read before they left school. Some of the LSTs related stories about illiteracy, which they said they used with their pupils to stress the importance and value of learning to read. Jim related one such story, too long to print in the text, about a past-pupil, which he reported using with his current pupils (Appendix E). Stories such as this moral tale were used sometimes to cajole, sometimes to exhort and sometimes to frighten pupils into accepting the expectations, values and norms of society regarding literacy. Implicit in these accounts was the belief that unless they were proficient in the literacy skills, which their particular society deemed necessary for survival, their pupils would be severely disadvantaged educationally, economically and socially. The LSTs accounts show that they believed part of their role as LSTs was to ensure that their pupils were ‘functionally literate’ because they considered the acquisition of ‘functional literacy’ was essential for membership not just of the literate community but also of society itself.

Their accounts show that the LSTs felt under pressure to help their pupils succeed in this battle so as to reach the required literacy standard. They drew on a discourse of guilt and pressure to paint a rather harassed picture of themselves. They spoke of “racing against the clock” and there being “so little time to get through everything”. Some of them worried if they were not engaged in teaching all the time and said they felt guilty about using time to liaise with outside agencies or engage in administrative duties. Both Sarah and Colm used the term “waves of children” to describe the strain they felt when

the next group is in on top of you and you feel you haven’t got through what you wanted to with the last group”.

(Sarah)

Careful analysis of the transcripts reveals that all the LSTs spoke of the lack of time and their feelings of responsibility for their pupils’ progress in learning to read. Therefore, part of the image they created and presented of themselves was one of taking on the responsibility for learning for their pupils. This conception of themselves is further confirmed by their assertions of belief and faith in their pupils’ ability to succeed. Using language with evangelical overtones, they professed their determination to maintain the highest expectations of their pupils and to be positive about their capacity to learn. They used language like “I believe in them” and “I’d never put a ceiling on what they can do”. Ciara’s declaration was typical of many of them

I have a very positive attitude towards the kids and towards the work....I think I would expect an awful lot of them. I’d be very positive. Well I’d be positive for them, you know, that kind of a way. I’d be like that...I hate that, when people don’t have enough faith in childrenfaith that they can do it. I think people can give up too easily.

(Ciara)

This dual perception of themselves as exacting task-masters, constantly pushing their pupils onward, and benevolent believers in their pupils’ capabilities, is linked with the third major theme discussed in the next

chapter –‘LSTs’ experience of parenthood’. It is not uncommon for parents to play the dual role of stick and carrot user. Analysis of their accounts shows that the LSTs presented themselves as bringing their parenting experiences to bear on their teaching. It is possible that, aware of the expectations and demands of society for a particular type of literate citizen, the LSTs, like many parents, felt obliged to induct their pupils into a particular view of literacy, a view which regards reading as an individual cognitive process, a prize that can be battled for and conquered.

Many of the LSTs used the phrase “doing the reading”, “doing the sight vocabulary” “doing the phonics” or “doing the library books”. This emphasis on *doing* something to, and the use of the definite article before the noun, reveals an implicit assumption that literacy is a solid, stable mass, capable of being worked upon. Jim talked of

“every child having worked through a programme of
phonics before they leave” (Jim)

Their descriptions of their daily lessons with various groups of pupils highlight this emphasis on working through a series of discrete tasks which build up to an eventual knowledge of *how to do reading*. Emily’s summary of work she did with one group of pupils was illustrative of the other LSTs’ approach.

So at the beginning of the year I suppose I *did* a lot of
.....em.....word matching, pre-reading activities. I’ve a lot
of little boxes of stuff here...see.(showing them) ...little
pictures...matching picture to word, matching words to
words.....So with that group now I would *do* their words
and *do* the sound of their letters and then they would *do*
their books for me. (Emily)

All this emphasis on “doing” suggests a perception of reading as a form of practical action. In their desire to help their pupils reach the literacy standards decreed by society, these “doing” references seem to imply that the LSTs viewed their role as teachers or mediators of do-able, practical activities that lead to ‘reading’.

Such an interpretation of *doing the reading* reveals what Street (1984) terms an autonomous model of literacy, one which stems from a cognitive perspective on learning and literacy. As explained earlier, this view presents literacy as a stable set of cognitive skills that can be isolated out and mastered. Analysis of the LSTs' accounts of 'a typical lesson' with a specific group of pupils reveals that their view of literacy and their reported methods of teaching reading closely matched Street's description of the autonomous model, where learning to read was viewed as a set of discrete skills to be mastered, as something to be 'done'. Street proposes an ideological, rather than an autonomous model of literacy – one which acknowledges the social, cultural and political embeddedness of literacy (Street, 1984; Hall, 1998; Gregory, 1994). Such an ideological model stresses the social construction of literacy as opposed to the view that literacy is a developmental, context-free, intellectual achievement, involving mastery of the same set of skills for all. This social constructionist view of literacy holds that there is no single, unchanging entity or definition of reading or literacy. Reading is viewed as a social process, a series of cultural practices, given meaning only by the people who engage in these practices. Meaning is specific to the time and context in which people engage in these processes (Luke, 1988; Maybin, 1994; Willinsky, 1990).

An autonomous model of literacy is not ideologically neutral. It merely appears to be neutral because it presents itself as being so commonsense that it is taken for granted. The LSTs' accounts of their practice in this study seem to show that they did not appear to question the taken-for-granted quality of an autonomous model of literacy. They just accepted it. A common feature amongst all the various models and approaches to the teaching of reading down through history is the fact that they are all underpinned by commonsense assumptions. Laying bare these assumptions provides a pathway to understanding the social context of literacy at different times. The accounts of the LSTs in this study imply that they were committed to a cognitive skills-based model of reading teaching. Their representation of themselves as advocates, responsible for their pupils' right and ability to learn to read, was compatible with this autonomous model of literacy, where their pupils were *doing the reading*.

Tensions between stated beliefs and described practice?

An attempt to analyse what counts as reading for these LSTs highlights a possible tension between what initially appeared to be two opposing approaches to the teaching of reading. The multi-layered analysis of the transcripts shows that in fact this apparent tension was between two different types of accounts the LSTs gave during the interviews. They offered accounts of their beliefs on the one hand, by outlining their general philosophical orientations to the teaching of reading, and accounts of their practice on the other, by detailing their daily work. The literature on the teaching of reading identifies three main models of reading teaching, often referred to as 'bottom-up', 'top-down' and 'interactive' (Stanovich, 1984). Each of these models reflects and embodies particular beliefs and values about the nature of the reading process and how reading should be taught. They position teachers and pupils, whether or not they are aware of the ideologies underpinning them, because these ideologies have become so taken for granted that they appear to be the most obvious and common-sense approaches to adopt. These are the three main models to which the LSTs in this study would have been exposed in their training as LSTs.

There are always difficulties, even dangers, involved in trying to make a fit between theoretical models and examples of professional practice.

Therefore it was considered to be undesirable to try to directly or neatly match the LSTs' accounts of their practice to particular theories of reading teaching underpinning their practice. Rather, an attempt was made to unpack the underlying assumptions behind their accounts of their practice. The LSTs' accounts of their daily practices in the teaching of reading seem to indicate that they were predominantly following a bottom-up, skills-based approach to literacy instruction, exemplified by the "doing the reading" notion discussed above. Yet, when describing their overall philosophy of reading teaching, all ten LSTs used language that is associated with an opposing model, a top-down, whole-language approach to teaching. They drew especially on this when they discussed what they believed was really important for their pupils to learn before they left the services of the LST. They talked of 'real reading', using 'real books', choosing materials and approaches arising from their pupils' interests, of reading having a purpose,

the importance of reading to and with children; they talked of their own love of reading and their desire to foster such a love of reading in their pupils.

When Ciara discussed what she thought was important for her pupils to learn about literacy, I asked her to try to treat me as a non-professional so that I could try to deconstruct some of the assumptions underlying the terminology she used. Ciara offered to explain her ideas as if she “was explaining it to a parent”.

What I would generally say is: to try to cultivate in your child a love for.....communication.....through language, through reading, through writing. It's a method of communication. It's a method of thinking. To do that they'd have to have a very positive approach to reading and to writing....that they would want to love to read, that they would want to love to speak. That would be my whole background to what I would be doing. I want the kids to want to come down here (to the LST)...to want to love to come down. It's fun, you see, there's loads of fun. There's variety, there's loads of books they're interested in. (*Ciara*)

Ciara's emphasis on reading being an enlightening experience, a process to be enjoyed is echoed in many of the others' expressions of their general theorising about the teaching of reading. Fred, for example talks of reading “enabling them to be full human beings”. Tony said reading should help

....them manage to make sense of the world around them....to clue into the world around them, into their own interests.....so that they can express themselves and stuff like that. (*Tony*)

It is possible to read a type of humanist orientation into these examples where the discourse they used implied that they equated reading with personal growth and fulfilment. The tension lies in that fact that although they stated their belief in the need for children to be immersed in enjoyable literacy activities, and to use their sense-making operations to learn to read, their accounts of their teaching of reading implied a very different

philosophy. In line with the postmodern notion of multiple identities, the LSTs moved between many different discourses to account for their selfhood. They appeared to comfortably inhabit different dimensions of their professional lives.

According to Westwood et al (1997, p. 226)

In terms of literacy instruction, teachers' personal beliefs about the nature of the reading process and how children actually acquire literacy skills tend to influence significantly their choice of instructional methods and materials.

However, the LSTs in this study appeared to have difficulty in following through from their personal beliefs about the "nature of the reading process and how children actually acquire literacy skills" to their actual practice, as expressed in their interview accounts. Perhaps this was because the grounded, practical nature of teaching reading to children who have difficulty in learning to read, took precedence over the more abstract, philosophical orientations, to which they were committed. Their craft knowledge, the theme discussed in chapter four, appeared to take over when it came to describing what they actually did when they taught reading. They appeared to invoke the more skills-based, bottom-up perspective when talking about their pupils' current needs and the specific teaching approaches appropriate for them, and the more humanistic top-down perspective when talking about the kind of literate people they hoped their pupils would become after the bottom-up approach has been successfully applied to them. It could be argued that this is perhaps an essential feature of the autonomous model described earlier.

Some of the LSTs appeared to be aware of the inherent tension or gap between their stated philosophy and their description of their practice. The transcripts show that they were often uncomfortable and appeared to struggle with this dilemma. Sarah, for example, lowered her voice to a conspiratorial type whisper and apologised for spending so much time reading to the pupils. Although she said she believed in the importance of reading to her pupils she somehow felt guilty about doing this.

I'm afraid I do read to them a lot. I think it's very important and if nobody else...if no other adult will read with them at home ...so I'm afraid I'm still reading and listening to them reading...but that's maybe at the expense of more phonics or other important things. (*Sarah*)

Sarah's comment fits well with the LSTs' accounts of their desire to cater for "the whole child", not just for "their reading needs". Their accounts indicate that while they had no difficulty expressing their 'dual' position, they did not appear to have worked out a 'professional' resolution to this tension or dilemma. Not without embarrassment, Ciara self-consciously declared "I don't want to sound too idealistic" when she outlined her 'liberal' and 'progressive' beliefs of how children learn and how she tries to teach them. Paula, Ciara and Tony all talked of being "creative" in their teaching and of the importance of fun in learning. Yet they seemed to find it difficult to throw off the shackles of "doing the reading" using phrases like "there are core things I have to get through every day", as if these were a chore, certainly not activities associated with creativity and fun. Whether or not they were aware of it, they appeared to be positioned into being a particular type of traditional, skills-oriented reading teacher, yet they kept trying to break away from this stereotype by declaring a belief in a more progressive approach. However, they never quite seemed to manage to rid themselves of the "guilt" and "responsibility" of adhering to a skill-based, didactic, transmission model of teaching reading. Judging from their accounts of their stated beliefs, they were not committed philosophically to this model. There was evidence of resistance, even if it was unconscious, to being positioned and pigeonholed into one particular model of reading instruction and of regarding other models as marginalised. According to Fairclough (1989, p.4) resistance is very important and is possible.

However,

...the effectiveness of resistance and the realization of change depend on people developing a critical consciousness of domination and its modalities, rather than just experiencing them.

The evidence from the transcripts suggests that the LSTs had experience of, rather than a critical consciousness of, the ideologies underpinning their models and methods of reading teaching.

The LSTs' childhood memories of reading

The LSTs' own childhood memories of reading and learning to read, as well as their attitudes to reading, informed the picture that emerged of their perception of themselves as teachers of reading. None of the LST recalled a negative experience of learning to read in school or at home. On the contrary, most of them spoke fondly and nostalgically of their early reading experiences. They used language like "I was enchanted with those fairytale books – *Puss in Boots* and all that"; Jim recalled the "smell and the shiny covers of the *Ladybird* books; Colm remembered the "lovely little pictures in *The Little Red Fox*" and Sarah talked of "following my mother around the house with a book and asking her words". Many of the others recalled the intimate, positive experience of having been read to as children. It is not unreasonable to conclude that these positive early experiences influenced their attitudes to the teaching of reading. The notion that learning to read and being a successful reader is tied up with one's positive self-concept was a recurring theme throughout the LSTs' accounts of their teaching of reading. All ten LSTs spoke of this connection between their pupils' self-confidence and their ability to make progress in reading. Tony reported that he believed most of his pupils' difficulties in learning to read were related to their lack of self-confidence.

In fact, nearly every child who has come into the room here has had a problem around confidence. So that's one of the really major things I try to do...create really good rapport with the children and create a situation wherein they can build up their confidence. That's almost enough, this is true. (*Tony*)

The LSTs' positive image of themselves as capable 'readers' appeared to be connected to their efforts to raise the self-confidence of their pupils, so that their pupils could also one day, regard themselves proudly as 'readers'. They wanted their pupils to share the same confidence they had in being a

‘reader’. Analysis of the transcripts show that the ethos and overriding attitude they tried to nurture was one of the pleasures and joy of reading. By using phrases such as “reading is for pleasure” and “you always have a friend if you have a book” they demonstrated their belief in the importance of fostering a love of reading in their pupils. Having discussed a book he was currently reading, Tony stated

I’m surrounded by books. I love reading. There’s always something on the go – novels mostly, but I also read psychology type books. I read all sorts. (*Tony*)

Tony identified himself as a ‘reader’ as did Fred when he described his excitement and joy of swapping books with his sixteen-year-old daughter.

It’s a marvellous thrill to see her imagination blossom and...eh....the whole experience of swapping books with her. It’s very exciting to see her developing an intellect and an imagination...and this is through the books. (*Fred*)

Their accounts show that they believed literacy to be a life-enhancing skill which could give pleasure to their pupils, help them “become fully human” (*Ciara*) or help them “make sense of the world around them” (*Tony*). Fred declared himself a reader – “I am a reader.....my mode of understanding something is a book”. This epitomised the LSTs’ identification of themselves with the position of “reader”. Part of their identity as a person as well as a teacher is that they were “readers”.

The constructivist stance adopted in this study holds that there is no single, unchanging definition or understanding of such complex notions as ‘reading’ or ‘reader’. However, the discursive approach used here also holds that people within social groups share assumptions regarding the language they use to signify their identity and the practices in which they engage. The LSTs in this study shared beliefs, values and assumptions regarding the teaching of reading to pupils who experience difficulty in learning to read. They used a specialised language to describe their distinctive practices and to establish themselves as ‘different’ from mainstream class-teachers, who may teach reading as a competence

servicing the curriculum, but who are not exclusive teachers of the 'reading curriculum'.

Some of the literacy practices in which they engage and into which they induct their pupils are also distinctively different from those engaged in by class-teachers. The LSTs in this study perceived that part of their role as LSTs was to induct their pupils into 'functional literacy' practices that would enable them to become full participants in the society in which they live. The life-history accounts documented here reveal a tension, sometimes consciously acknowledged, between the LSTs' stated aspirations for literacy and their described practice. On the one hand they espoused a theoretical model of teaching reading that fosters the process and the love of reading real books, and on the other hand, they described their practice of reading teaching using an instrumentalist, skill-based approach.

The LSTs' identities are partly constructed by the literacy practices in which they engage. For them, part of being a LST includes developing pupils' self esteem as a prerequisite for competence and success in reading. Their own positive early and current reading experiences have influenced their teaching of reading. With missionary-like zeal, coupled with feelings of guilt and responsibility, they pledged their commitment to fostering a love of reading in their pupils. The LSTs in this study regarded themselves as readers. They wanted their pupils to regard themselves as readers also.

Chapter Six

Learning Support Teachers' Experience of Parenthood

Before reviewing the literature or discussing the findings in relation to the LSTs' experience of parenthood it is necessary to explain how the theme of parenthood arose from the data. From the earliest interviews, including the pilot interview, the LSTs referred to their role as parents as they talked about their work and lives. As this was a strong recurring theme that was closely linked to a key conceptual framework underpinning the study (the construction of identity), I was particularly sensitive to it and probed the LSTs further each time it arose. Although the strength and persistence of the theme struck me as unusual each time it occurred, on reflection it is not surprising that such a theme should emerge from life-history interviews of people at the age and stage of the LSTs in this study. A person's relationship with his or her parents and their experiences of parenthood have major significance for them throughout their lives. In telling their stories a large part of how the LSTs negotiated and constructed their identities consisted of the fact that they were all parents.

Review of the Literature

Biographical studies of teachers show that it is not unusual for teachers to compare their role as parent with that of teacher (Griffiths, forthcoming; Huberman, 1993b; Kelchtermans, 1993). Sikes (1997), in her study of parents who teach, recalls how she had noticed, but not regarded as significant at the time, that approximately three quarters of the forty five teachers she and Measor had interviewed for earlier biographical work (Sikes et al, 1985) had talked about how they believed their teaching had changed as a result of becoming parents. Having subsequently become a parent herself, Sikes was intensely interested in the relationship between parenting and teaching. The LSTs in the current study all shared a common vocabulary that was centred around the discourse of parenting. Their accounts show that they believed that part of their sense of themselves as teachers was tied up with their identity as parents. This chapter investigates

the influence of the discourse of parenting on their professional lives as LSTs.

While there are extensive separate bodies of literature on parenting and on teaching, there is relatively little research on the relationship between parenting and teaching, on teachers who are parents or on parents who are teachers. There is an abundance of advice for parents on how to 'teach' their children ranging from self-help manuals on child-rearing (Yates, 1990) to 'paired reading' approaches aimed at developing children's reading at home (Topping and Lindsay, 1992). The emphasis tends to be on the teachers or 'experts' telling the parents what and how to do rather than capitalising on parental skills for teaching. The relationship between parenting and teaching does not seem to be recognised or valued. Even in the biographical studies of teachers mentioned above, the relationship is alluded to rather than given any in-depth treatment. Sikes's (1997) book *Parents who Teach* is an exception and almost the entire work is devoted to what she calls "the fundamental links between mothering and teaching" (p. 36).

The term 'mothering' is important here as the scant literature that does exist tends to focus on mothering within an explicitly feminist framework rather than on fathering or parenting in general (Grumet, 1988; Casey, 1990; 1993; Steedman, 1988). There is a commonsense assumption that parenting means mothering. The concept of mothering as a social and pre-dominantly patriarchal construction is a central theme in feminist theory and research (Glenn et al, 1994; Everingham, 1994; Phoenix, 1991). Teaching in the Western world, particularly primary teaching, has become almost synonymous with women teachers. Yet according to Sikes (1997, p. 11) the notion of parent as teacher

is an area which has not been seen as a significant and important factor influencing how teachers teach. This has meant that it has rarely been considered to be a legitimate focus for academic study and research.

Hence this review draws on the relatively small body of literature that does exist, on the brief references to the close relationship between parenting and

teaching in the separate literatures on teaching and parenting, and on the ideologies of parenting and teaching which are socially, historically and culturally constructed and which have attained commonsense status over time.

A number of explanations can be offered for the neglect in the research of the parent as teacher. Although schools may claim to adhere to the notion that parents are the primary educators of their children, traditionally, as evidenced in their school policy documents regarding the role of parents, schools have tended to regard themselves as the sole experts when it comes to educating pupils. The history of the relationship between parents and schools as institutions is chequered and reflects the cultural, social and political climate of the time. Historically, parents went from being excluded from schools to being used as fund raisers or volunteer classroom assistants with strictly delineated and limited roles. The Education Reform Act of 1988 in England and Wales shifted the role of parents to that of consumers (Hughes et al, 1994). This market-driven approach was tempered by viewing parents as 'partners' with schools in the education of their children (Bastiani, 1995; Blamires, 1997). More recently, particularly in the areas of special education and social disadvantage, the focus has been on 'empowering' parents to collaborate with teachers for the good of their children (Carpenter, 1996; Macbeth, 1995). However, there is much anecdotal evidence from parents and schools to support Cortazzi's (1990) analysis of teachers' thinking about parents in terms of binary opposites - as a tension between the two polarities of teacher and parent. It would appear that many teachers prefer to keep parents, particularly those they regard as "awkward", at a distance while schools get on with the job of teaching. Hence, parenting skills have not been recognised as potentially useful for teaching.

In highlighting the similarity of the relationship between parent and child and teacher and pupil there is a danger of implying that those teachers who are not parents may not perhaps share the full professional identity of teachers and that their teaching may in some way be impoverished. This is both unfounded and untrue and it is entirely possible that many teachers

who are parents may not draw on their experiences of parenthood at all. However, this implicit danger may be part of the reason why research on the relationship between teaching and parenting is avoided. Highlighting the theme of parenthood and teaching merely acknowledges that there are some positive aspects of the relationship that can be identified and exploited for the benefit of teaching (Sikes, 1997, pp. 12, 134; Grumet, 1988). This includes the experiences of being children of parents and of working with parents of children, both of which roles extend to all teachers.

The commonsense notion that teachers act as ‘glorified babysitters’ may also partly explain why there is a reluctance to acknowledge and research the relationship between parenting and teaching. Again such a pejorative notion ignores the fact that certain experiences of parenting can be fruitfully brought to bear on teaching. However, perhaps the biggest obstacle to researching this relationship is the influence of traditional, positivist, cognitively-based research which has tended to mistrust the affective and nurturing elements of teaching. By highlighting the theme of parenthood in its broadest sense, which emerged so forcibly from the data, the current study celebrates the LSTs’ accounts of what Grumet (1988, p. XV1) calls

the intimacy of nurture in their own histories and in their work in education.

Although it merits only fleeting references, there is a recognition in the literature on teachers’ lives that there is a close link between the experiences and skills of parenting and of teaching. As far back as the early 1800s in England there was an effort to

reproduce the structure of the family in the public domain of the school.

as Clarke (1985, p. 81) shows in her study of the history of the infant education movement. In his study of the affective aspects in teacher-pupil relationships Woods (1987) talks of the “teacher as friend” and the “family spirit” (pp. 121, 122), “demanded by the teacher’s parental role” (p. 143), which underlies much of the pedagogy of primary school teaching. This same theme is echoed in references to the direct relationship between teachers’ experiences of their own children and of their pupils. For

example, Huberman (1993b, p. 253) found that teachers who were parents of children with problems were much more understanding of pupils with problems than teachers who were parents of children without problems. Griffiths (forthcoming) also found that mother student-teachers transferred their parenting skills from their own children with positive affect to their teaching. There is an emerging consensus amongst those who have researched parents who are teachers that there is no real separation between the personal and professional life of a parent who teaches because knowledge and experience from both roles are constantly reflected back onto each other (Sikes 1997, p. 88, Grumet, 1988; Casey, 1993).

Taking up this notion of the similarity between the roles of parenting and teaching, Grumet (1988, p.5) talks of the “dialectical relation” between women’s private, personal experience of nurturing and their “public project” of teaching. Arguing that parenting and pedagogy are closely intertwined, she describes what she calls “the look” in parenting

which is lodged in biological moments in the history of the child’s physical development (and the ‘look’ in teaching which is) lodged in culture in the social forms and institutions that exist in any given historical moment and through which society shapes the young (p. 106),

The discourse on teaching has traditionally been dominated by a patriarchal, anti-feelings stance, which has tended to ignore and often deny the existence of the nurturing elements of pedagogy (Grumet, 1988; Casey, 1990; Sikes, 1997). Yet the majority of teachers, at least in primary schools in the Western world, are women. An analysis of some of the ideologies underpinning the conceptions of teaching and parenting, or more accurately, teaching and mothering, shed some light on this irony.

Outlining the ‘mother-made-conscious’ model of teaching Sikes (from Steedman, 1997, p. 67) claims that the discourse of teaching is dominated by an ideology and practice that positions the ‘ideal teacher’ as the ‘ideal mother’. She argues that these two positions have become so interconnected that mothering and teaching are “almost identical dominant ideologies” (p. 68). These ideologies have found expression in child-

centred curricula and practices and in the notion that teachers should be parent-substitutes - ideologies so prevalent in primary teaching since the influence of the Plowden Report in the UK (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967) and of the 1971 Primary School Curriculum in Ireland (Department of Education, 1971). There is a commonsense assumption that the teacher is in loco-parentis, a position which many teachers readily embrace thereby reproducing this cultural assumption (Sikes, 1997; Grumet, 1988; Phoenix, 1991; Steedman, 1982).

The assumptions underpinning the concept of the teacher in loco-parentis and the 'mother-made-conscious' teaching model are closely related to other dominant ideologies which have been socially and culturally constructed throughout history. There is a need to examine the assumptions behind such notions which equate 'natural mothers' with 'natural teachers' unless these ideologies are to retain and increase their commonsense status. The fundamental assumption upon which the notion of 'natural mothering' is built is a social construction which feminist theory claims is a patriarchal ideology that

locks women into biological reproduction and denies them identities and selfhood outside mothering (Glenn 1994, p. 9).

The existence of such a variety of mothers across the world, in different social and economic circumstances and throughout history confirms the argument that the dominant Western popular notion of the 'natural mother' is in fact a social construction which meets particular social needs at particular times in history. The mother-made-conscious model of teaching locks all teachers, male and female, with and without their own children, into positions which have been socially constructed by powerful groups in society who ignore any identity of teaching outside of their own definition.

Exposing the assumptions underlying such ideologies should not lead to a denial of those positive elements inherent in parenting which can be applied to teaching. What is called for is a new discourse on teaching that values the positive elements of nurturing embedded in parenthood. The notion of nurture in teaching has not figured to any extent in the discourse on

education. The discourse has instead been dominated by cognitive theory and the endeavour of 'objective science'. As Grumet (1988, p. 59) says

If we ask women who teach to talk about their work in the language that dominates the discourse of schooling, we invite language that celebrates system and denies doubt, that touts objectives and denies ambivalence, that confesses frustration but withholds love.

This is not a plea for a sentimental emotionally-charged type of pedagogy. Neither is it a desire to reproduce such destructive, limiting ideological notions of teachers as self-sacrificing 'natural mother-teachers'. Rather it is a call for an acknowledgement of the value of nurture and care which is embedded in parenting, be it by mothers or fathers. This is the sort of nurturing that leads to action and interaction in a truly human educational enterprise - the sort of political responsibility exhibited by Casey's women teachers working for social justice (Casey, 1993).

As was postulated in chapter two, there is no such thing as a single individual identity. The LSTs in this study have multiple identities which they both create for themselves and which have been created for them by various historical and prevailing discourses and social practices. Just as they took on a new identity when they changed from being class-teachers to being LSTs, so too their identity was altered when they became parents. They were perceived as 'LSTs' or as 'parents' in a new light which carried many different expectations and demands to their 'pre-LST' and 'pre-parent' existences. The experiences of parenthood, whether or not they are parents themselves, act as key influences in teachers' construction of themselves. This study takes the stance that it is only possible to investigate teachers' professional identity in the context of their personal lives. Acknowledging what Mitchell and Weber (1999, p.5) call "the personal in teaching", the LSTs' construction of parenthood and their accounts of what that means for their lives and work are now discussed.

Presentation and Analysis of Findings

In answering the research question posed in chapter one, "how do LSTs perceive and describe their own identity?", discourse analysis of the

interviews reveals that one of the discourses the LSTs used to account for themselves and their work was that of parenthood. They all drew on a common vocabulary and repertoire of parenthood to describe one conception they presented of themselves as LSTs.

The LSTs talked at length about their own children and the effect which being a parent had on their teaching. Because the initial interviews were with LSTs who were also mothers, it was decided to interview fathers to see if the theme of parenthood was sustained across gender. Indeed parenthood emerged as one of the distinctive discourses upon which both male and female LSTs drew and used to account for their work and role. All ten LSTs were parents as well as teachers and only one, Sarah, was a parent before she started teaching. As with the parent-teachers in Sikes's study (1997, p.134), the other nine compared their experiences of teaching before and after becoming parents and spoke of how their notions of selfhood and teaching changed profoundly once they became parents. It was difficult to ascertain in which ways this group of LSTs was distinguishable from the teaching profession as a whole in their experience of parenthood. As discussion on the overarching theme of the LST as 'different' illustrated, they certainly perceived themselves and felt others perceived them to be in a category apart from mainstream class-teachers. However, when they talked about this profound change in their teaching as a result of becoming parents, they were initially referring to their early experiences of parenthood, before many of them had become LSTs. In many ways their experience of parenthood did not appear to be different to that of mainstream class-teachers. Nevertheless, part of their current construction of their identity, through the discourse of the interview, was informed by their experiences of parenthood while they were LSTs. For at least the past three years, longer for some of them, they were experiencing parenthood from their position as LST rather than as class-teacher.

A variety of experiences of parenthood

Although they had had different experiences of parenthood at various stages in their lives, all the LSTs had been part of a number of discourses of parenthood which shaped the way they now represented themselves as they

talked about themselves and their work. Judging from their accounts, parenthood, experienced in many forms (as children of parents, as parents of children, as teachers who had dealings with parents of pupils), appeared to be a powerful determinant in shaping their identity as teachers and as LST. Many of them recalled *the influence of their own parents* and drew on these memories to help them account for the sort of LST they had become. For example, Tony spoke of his mother “who lived to serve” and of his father’s “strong sense of justice”, which he felt influenced his decision to be a teacher. Indeed he said all his brothers and sisters were working in “the caring professions” and he felt this was directly attributable to his parents’ influence. Moving beyond the effect of parenthood on him as a class-teacher, he also attributed the sense of “vocation”, he currently feels about LS teaching, to his parents. In this respect, identifying LS teaching as a vocation, is linked to Tony’s memories of his parents. Colm also ascribed much of the way he teaches now to the influence of his parents.

Much of my values, my beliefs come from the way I was taught myself....way I was mothered myself....things your mother would say to you. You’re working on some of those constructions because you feel they’re part of the good ways you were brought up. Also the bad ways.....very hard to keep it out.....the bad things.

(Colm)

He used specific language like “mothering” and “ways you were brought up” to link his early experiences of childhood to his current self-representation as a LST. There were other similar instances where the LSTs matched their current perception of themselves to their experiences with their parents. Paula recalled her father’s view of “teaching as an honourable job” as she spoke of the sense of pride she feels in her profession as a LST; Jim remembered the pressure he felt to conform and curtail his “rebellious streak” by becoming a teacher because both his parents were teachers. He now describes himself as “a rebel” and is careful, as a LST, not to

....put children in a box and give them an education – like cod liver oil. “You mightn’t like it now, but one day you’ll be really glad. If this is administered to you it will

make you really strong for the future. It will give you what you want for the future”.

Instead he described how he tries to teach -

....being involved in their learning ..John Dewey’s system...those radical thinkers in education...they basically have it right – Froebel, Montessori, even back to Rousseau where children are involved in doing....where it is real. (*Jim*)

By sustaining the medical model with words like “cod liver oil”, “administered” and “make you strong”, Jim effectively used a contrasting discourse of a more liberal, humanist approach to education. By appealing to well established, respected authorities on education, Dewey, Froebel, Montessori and Rousseau, he further strengthened his case for his approach to teaching. Thus the LSTs drew on their earliest experiences of parenthood, as children themselves, to create their current identity as LSTs. While many of these experiences influenced them as mainstream class-teachers, the life-history interview allowed the LSTs link some of these early childhood experiences to their current construction of themselves as LSTs.

The LSTs, as parents themselves, had children of different ages and stages ranging from Matt, whose wife was expecting their second child at the time of interviewing, to Colm, whose only child had not yet started school, to the others who had children in school or college, to Sarah whose eldest had left home and was married. The transcripts show that they drew on their own experiences of parenthood when accounting for their practices of LS teaching and their dealings with children who were their pupils. Part of the identity they constructed for themselves was that of parent-teacher as many of them spoke of treating their pupils as they would like their own children to be treated. Paula’s comment was illustrative of their views

...so if you’re asking yourself those questions for your own children you’ve got to be honest and ask them for the children you work with. There isn’t a distinction. It’s em – if it’s right for your child at home it’s right for the

children in school and they deserve what you'd give your own. (*Paula*)

Paula's claim "there isn't a distinction" implies that she treated her pupils just as she did her own children. If this is so, for Paula, both the identities, that of parent and of teacher, are incorporated.

None of the LSTs ever used the word pupil or student to refer to their pupils. Instead they always referred to them as 'children'. They used endearing terms which were closer to discourses more usually associated with parenting than teaching. In positioning themselves into this parental role, some of the LSTs drew on their pupils' language to strengthen the image they created during the interviews of themselves as parent-teacher. They reported that sometimes "the children would call you Mammy". Emily talked of a child unexpectedly hugging her one day, something which was, as she said, most unusual in Irish primary schools. It is not unreasonable to infer that the small numbers involved in LS teaching, the individual relationships formed and the generally more intimate setting of LS teaching facilitated the LSTs in adopting the parent-teacher subject position. In this way, the discourse of LS teaching is perhaps more conducive than mainstream, class-teaching to the parental role. This again highlights the difference between class-teachers and LSTs, discussed earlier in chapter three. By relating these examples of how their pupils also sometimes perceived them in the parental role, the LSTs reinforced their own construction of themselves in that role. Speaking of what she called her "soft and kind motherly" attitude, Sarah said

I hope I'd never lose that and I do think that from being a parent and from being a Mammy you have that little kernel in there". (*Sarah*)

Sarah's declaration "I hope I never lose that" implies that she was proud of her self-image as a parent and felt it was an important aspect of her dealings with her pupils.

There were lots of instances where the LSTs displayed a pride in their representation of themselves as parent-teachers as Vera explained.

You bring your mothering to the children that you're dealing with – you know – like even simple things like going out in the yard....I don't know what it does when I see a child going out in the yard without a coat on. Do you know, little things – you know, a child is sick or a child is hurt. You know if your own child comes home and says he was in trouble, or something happened and then you'd be thinking – oh God - about the times you might have said something without even thinking.....once it's done, it's done. (*Vera*)

Vera's comment was typical of the nurturing overtones in many of the LSTs's articulations of themselves as parent-teachers. Throughout their accounts the identity of the LST as teacher and as parent was constantly interwoven. They compared and used their own children's progress and development as benchmarks for that of their pupils. When talking of the need for parental support for children's learning they drew on their own experience of parenting. Matt, for example, described the reciprocal relationship between LS teaching and parenting, when he explained how the concept of emergent literacy as a theoretical construct, became a reality for him when he encountered it with his own two-year-old son. He had never made this connection when he was a class-teacher. It was only when he was working with pupils as a LST, who were, like his son, becoming aware of the conventions and patterns in books and print, that he fully understood the concept of emergent literacy.

Careful analysis of the transcripts shows that the LSTs had so incorporated the role of parent into their identity as LST that they crossed between the two roles all the time as they described their daily teaching practices. They used phrases like "well, with my own children" or "I'm talking here now about my children in school, not my own", which helped them build a seamless thread between their roles as parents and as teachers. Jim also described what Sikes (1997, p. 72) calls a "two-way exchange: parent-teacher, teacher-parent". He outlined how his parenting influenced his

teaching, but also how the experience of LS teaching impacted on his identity as a father at home.

I think I have become a better father as a result of being a remedial teacher because again it's opened my eyes to the importance of language and I think I intervene more now in their (his own children's) language development whereas I probably wouldn't have intervened before. I'm more conscious of the fact that I should read more often to the children and I tended to leave that more to my wife....feel guilty over not reading to them. (*Jim*)

Just like Matt's experience, described above, it was Jim's experience of LS teaching that made him "more conscious" of specific ways he, as father, could influence his children's literacy development. Thus, the LSTs used language to inextricably link the roles of LST and parent.

The LSTs referred to another layer of parenthood throughout their accounts which they used to help build their construction of themselves as parent-teachers – that was, *their experiences with the parents of their pupils*. Apart from Sarah, whose two children were already in school before she started teaching, all the others spoke of a greater understanding of their pupils as children and of their pupils' parents as parents, since becoming parents themselves. In fact, Sarah said one of the reasons she had become interested in teaching initially was because one of her daughters was experiencing difficulties in learning mathematics in school and she, as a parent, was surprised at how little help there was for such children at that time. Many of the LSTs drew on a discourse of guilt and self-chastisement to express their previous lack of understanding of the parents' perspective and of what they described as the unreasonable demands they made on parents before they became parents themselves. Emily talked of looking "back with horror" because she "demanded perfection" and she had "no understanding" for parents and children. Many mainstream class-teachers, who become parents, probably express the same sort of regrets and lack of understanding. However, the LSTs in this study also spoke of a greater empathy they now had with parents, as a result of being LSTs, because they had a deeper

understanding of the difficulties their pupils had in learning. According to Fred, being a father and a LST gave him

a greater insight into the parents and where they're coming from. I've noticed that about teachers – a lot of them – they've no idea. They really don't and they're a bit intolerant of the hang-ups that the parents have. The burden of homework and all of that and how little of it was genuinely useful and you know, all their worries and the difficulties and the anxieties and the successes and what seemed to be good and what they wanted out of school.
(Fred)

Fred's observation that a lot of teachers have "no idea" and are "a bit intolerant" implies that he, as LST and a father, felt he had a greater understanding and empathy with the parents of his pupils than many of his mainstream colleagues. It would be unfair and unfounded to suggest that teachers who are not parents lack an understanding of parents. However, it is possible that LSTs who are also parents, by virtue of their work with children who have difficulties in learning, may possess insights into the perspectives of parents, which are particular to them, a view confirmed by the literature (Huberman, 1993b; Griffiths, forthcoming). Certainly the LSTs' accounts demonstrate that they believed this was the case. The picture of their identity that emerges from an analysis of the LSTs' accounts, in the context of parenthood, is one where the two roles, that of parent and LST, the personal and the professional, appear to be most compatible. Furthermore, discourse analysis of the data show that they are not just compatible - the LSTs appear to inhabit both identities simultaneously. LS teaching seemed to facilitate this merging of the two identities - that of teacher and of parent.

Ideologies of parenthood and teaching

Through their accounts, the LSTs articulated the values, ideologies and assumptions of teaching and parenthood to which they had been exposed and which they reinforced through their practices. As Ivanic (1998, p.17) says,

The way in which people take on particular identities is by producing and receiving culturally recognised, ideologically shaped representations of reality.

One of the identities taken on by the LSTs in this study was that of parent-teacher and teacher-parent. By studying their transcripts, it was possible to detect some of the dominant ideologies and public expectations of parenthood and teaching both now and throughout history.

Depending on the political, economic and social climate of the time, various ideologies of parenthood and teaching have dominated throughout history. One of these ideologies, discussed earlier in the literature review, which views the teacher as being in 'loco-parentis', underpinned the LSTs' accounts of themselves and their work as LSTs. The concept of the teacher in loco-parentis has been prevalent for many years (Sikes, 1997; Steedman, 1982). As Apple (1993, p. X111) points out, in his introduction to Casey's life histories of women teachers, by the end of the nineteenth century teaching was seen as

women's true profession.....an extension of and preparation for their role as wife and mother

Indeed, Paula recalled her father saying, "teaching's a grand job for a girl", when she was choosing a career after she had left school. Similarly, Colm remembered that "teaching was not something the boys did". Teaching, particularly primary teaching, has always carried the commonsense connotation of being women's work. The qualities most often admired were those associated with motherhood. Historically and socially, parenting has been viewed as primarily mothering rather than fathering. Interestingly however, there did not appear to be any difference between the accounts of the men and the women LSTs in this study with regard to how they drew upon their experiences of parenthood when they were constructing their identities as LSTs. All the LSTs (both fathers and mothers) in this study took on the identity of parent, with its nurturing overtones, in order to represent themselves as LSTs in their life-history interviews.

According to Menter et al with Pollard (1997), education carries many expectations with it. Teachers, pupils and schools, as the public face of

education, carry the expectations and demands of the most powerful groups in society. As well as being positioned into certain roles and practices by the most dominant groups, schools also carry the expectations, hopes and aspirations of the less powerful, such as individual and particular groups of parents and pupils. Schools and teachers also convey powerful notions of what it means to be a “good” parent. As well as shaping the discourses of LS teaching and parenthood, the LSTs in this study were also created by these discourses.

As with any public role, LS teaching carries various perceptions and expectations of that role. The LST may be seen as - a type of teacher-doctor, who remedies and cures difficulties in learning; as a substitute parent or babysitter; as an expert teacher with specialist knowledge and skills unavailable to other teachers. Commonsense notions such as these quickly become naturalised so that the ideologies underpinning them are hidden and taken for granted (Fairclough, 1989; Gee, 1999). These ideologies influence and help form the thinking, practices and beliefs of teachers.

The taken for granted notion that teachers are in loco-parentis is particularly commonplace in the area of special education, where children with difficulties in learning are seen to be in need of care as well as education. Thus the LSTs in this study were positioned into this role of parent-substitute. Their accounts reflected not only their acceptance of this role, but also an embracing of it as a major part of their identity as LSTs. The assumption that they were in loco-parentis underpinned the LSTs’ articulations of selfhood throughout the data.

The life-history interview process allows different identities to emerge (Hansen-Nelson, 1993; Antikainen et al, 1996; Clements, 1999). From the very first interview the theme of parenthood emerged as a strong identifier of selfhood and a key element in the teachers’ accounts of themselves and their work. Cultural knowledge is often studied by reviewing big life events. Parenthood is one such event or critical incident. The LSTs in this study spoke of key stages in their lives and those of their partners and

children as having shaped the sort of people and teachers they are today. As Ball and Goodson (1985, p.13) point out,

The teacher's previous career and life experience shape
their views of teaching and the way he or she sets about it.

The data show that for the LSTs in this study, parenthood was certainly an experience which affected and shaped their view of teaching and how they set about it.

Chapter Seven

Summary of Findings

The discourse of LS Teaching

Analysis of the LSTs' stories revealed the overarching theme of 'difference', which was expressed in the recurring themes of craft knowledge, the teaching of reading and parenthood. These themes provide a valuable composite picture of LSTs' identity, work and membership of a specialised discourse community. Although the individual LSTs used language for different purposes, there was a consistency in the repeated discursive patterns of identity. This chapter attempts to collate these themes in order to show what it means, for these ten teachers, to be LSTs working in primary schools in the east-coast of Ireland.

Although the individual LSTs constructed multiple identities and drew on various discourses to represent themselves and their work, their accounts show that they had much in common because of their shared membership of the discourse of LS teaching. One of the purposes of this study was to investigate whether or not such an order of discourse existed. The evidence from this study shows that there is a recognisable way of using language and engaging in specific practices that can be described as a discourse of LS teaching. The LSTs in this study were all members of the network of LSTs. Unlike their mainstream class-teaching colleagues, they worked with a distinctive group of pupils who have difficulty in learning to read. They engaged in distinctive practices in teaching their pupils reading. They all inherited the position of LST, which had been established in the Irish educational system for forty years and in their schools for a number of years before they took up the position and they used distinctive language and drew on specialised terminology to define and discuss their work. Analysis of this language shows that they held in common certain values, beliefs and assumptions which underpinned their work.

An outstanding feature of the discourse of LS teaching, which they both inherited and created, was the notion that they, as LSTs, were different from

other mainstream class-teachers. Their accounts show that they perceived themselves, and believed others perceived them to be, different from mainstream class-teachers. This recurred throughout the data and underpinned the major themes which emerged from this study. Throughout their accounts they constantly compared LS and class-teaching. From the vantage point of having formerly been class-teachers, they drew on a language of contrast and comparison to highlight the positive and negative differences between the two types of teaching. Nevertheless, the data also show that they held much in common with the main body of teachers because they were also members of the general teaching discourse community. For example, the literature on teachers' lives and careers shows that many teachers have a strong sense of vocation in and personal commitment to their jobs (Nias, 1989; Huberman, 1993b; Casey, 1993). The LSTs in this study drew heavily on a discourse of personal investment and commitment to describe their work and identity. The literature on teachers who are also parents shows that these teachers bring much of their experience of parenthood to bear on their teaching (Sikes, 1997; Griffiths, forthcoming). The LSTs, who were all parents, used the discourse of the interview to present themselves as parent-teachers and teacher-parents. In many ways the LSTs in this study appear to be no different from other teachers. However, the overwhelming and persisting element in their self-representation throughout their accounts was that they were 'different'.

The LST as 'Different'

It is not surprising that the LSTs represented themselves and their practices as different because an analysis of the concepts LST and LS teaching reveals an assumption that 'ordinary' or 'normal' learning is not taking place and therefore some sort of alternative, support for learning is required. In their commentary on the key terms 'remedial reading' and 'remedial reader' in the teaching of reading, Stierer and Bloome argue that what drives these terms ideologically is

a need to justify the ordinary and usual reading education programmes provided and to rationalise both the exclusion of some pupils and the privileges accorded to others (1994, p. 84).

The terms 'LST' and 'LS teaching' work in a similar way, not simply because they are the terms that have replaced 'remedial teacher' and 'remedial teaching', but because they are what Stierer and Bloome call "exclusion categories". They exclude the pupils who avail of LS from the mainstream, 'regular' or 'normal' reading programme, while at the same time, they protect the reading programme offered in the mainstream class to all those pupils who do not attend the LST. Because certain pupils do not learn to read within the mainstream reading programme, they are deemed to be in need of a 'different' programme. This reinforces the commonsense assumption that the mainstream reading programme is the autonomous, 'correct' one and that all others are deviations from it. As Florio-Ruane and McVee (2000) contend illiteracy only exists in relation to its opposite – literacy. The way the mainstream reading programme is defined determines our perception of all programmes other than those of the mainstream. Thus the pupils who avail of LS and the LSTs themselves are defined in relation to the reading programme in the mainstream classroom. Rather than embracing the whole host of pupils and literacy practices that exist in society, the reading programme offered in the mainstream classroom negatively defines those who cannot or do not access it. Just as the pupils attending the LST are identified and categorised educationally and socially as being 'different' from their mainstream peers, so too are the teachers who teach them – the LSTs. The assumptions underpinning the concepts of LS and LST are inherently ideological and political.

The LSTs in this study did not discuss such critical theoretical issues as the relationship between the workings of power and the construction of their identity. They did however draw strongly on a discourse of exclusion, marginalisation, isolation and sometimes even of loss to construct their professional identities. The very term, LST, offers them a marginalised position, one which is the polar opposite of 'mainstream teacher', that is, 'not the mainstream teacher'. They worked with pupils who were excluded from the mainstream reading programme and they engaged in ways of working which were different from those of the class-teacher. When they described the 'functional literacy' programmes and the skills-based practices in which they engaged, it was possible to see how the content of

their work defined them as 'different'. It appears that LSTs and their pupils are forced to take up positions which are subordinate and marginal to the mainstream position. As a corollary to being excluded, the LSTs used language to construct an identity for themselves as 'special' and proud of it. Thus by drawing on this 'special' discourse, they presented themselves as powerful in comparison to class-teachers. They contrasted the negative attributes of loneliness and misunderstanding with an image of themselves as autonomous and being outside many of the usual restrictions experienced by class-teachers. They used specific jargon and concepts to display their specialised knowledge of teaching reading to children who have difficulty in learning to read. They described their specialist teaching methods, specialised ways of working and specialist knowledge of their pupils. They contrasted this distinctive knowledge with their former lack of such specialised knowledge when they were mainstream class-teachers. Thus they accepted both positions offered to them by the discourse of LS teaching – that of being excluded and of being special.

The LSTs used a variety of resources to describe and define their work and their professional identities as 'different'. The multiple identities which they created for themselves as different, as craftspeople, as teachers of reading, as caring professionals in loco-parentis, - as well as many others not documented in this study - present a picture of what it means to be a LST. They used the interview process to present themselves as specialist teachers of reading. They used their knowledge of their craft of teaching to create an image of themselves as 'experts' and to show that their work was grounded in the specific contexts in which they worked. The accounts of their practice show that they married their situated, practical teaching activities to their philosophical reflections on the nature of that work. They brought their various experiences of parenthood to bear on their teaching and constructed an identity for themselves as teacher-parents and parent-teachers. They mixed their personal and professional identities to create a picture of themselves as caring, responsible LSTs who are seriously committed to their jobs. Thus, their professional identities were constructed by the language they used to describe themselves and the practices in which they engaged.

The teaching of Reading

One way that the LSTs appeared to mark themselves out as ‘different’ was by identifying themselves exclusively as teachers of reading. They represented themselves as teachers who enable pupils to access the reading curriculum, with its own aims, rationale and methods, and also as teachers who teach the reading skills needed to access other areas of the curriculum and knowledge. The positive early childhood and current experiences of reading that they remembered and related in the interviews, helped to define the image they presented of themselves as ‘readers’, an image they seemed anxious to pass on to their pupils. Their accounts show that they also perceived themselves as responsible for inducting their pupils into the ‘functional’ literacy practices necessary for their survival in society. In this regard ‘functional’ literacy appeared to be linked to their perception of reading as a form of practical action.

Analysis of the LSTs’ articulations, beliefs and values regarding the teaching of reading highlights what at first glance appears to be a tension between their accounts of their practice and their accounts of their general philosophical orientations. Their accounts of their practice seem to suggest that they were following a cognitive, skills and product-based approach to the teaching of reading in line with a traditionalist, behaviourist approach to reading pedagogy (Adams, 1990; Turner, 1990; 1991; Ott, 1997). They talked, for example, of teaching discrete skills, such as specific phonic combinations, which they felt were best acquired in a hierarchy of graded steps. However, their articulations of their beliefs and philosophising on the teaching of reading appeared to encompass a much broader conception of reading as a process which enables one to communicate and use one’s sense-making operations to interact with written texts in what some of them called “a fully human manner” (Wray and Medwell, 1991; Goodman, 1992; Willinsky, 1994). They talked of motivating their pupils to love reading and books; they explained how reading had to have a purpose. Both these models position teachers into teaching in specific ways because, like all models, they are underpinned by particular ideologies. The accounts of the LSTs in this study show that they did not appear to question the taken-for-granted assumptions underlying these models but accepted them as the most

obvious and commonsense approaches to take when teaching reading. Their accounts show that they appeared to have 'bought into' the notion of the autonomy of the mainstream reading position. The fact that they had virtually nothing to say about such issues as power relations, ideology or discourse shows that Fairclough (1989) is correct about the way dominant ideologies become naturalised. The data show that the assumptions underpinning what Street (1984) calls an *autonomous model of literacy* were not questioned by the LSTs and had therefore achieved the status of commonsense. Their descriptions of their teaching practice seemed to suggest that the skill-based, product-type approach appeared to win out when it came to how they actually taught their pupils on a daily basis, but their more process-oriented, liberal philosophy represented their aspirations for their pupils once they had successfully partaken of the instrumentalist approach. However, it is not possible, or even sensible, to try to find a direct match between teachers' practices and specific theoretical frameworks which underpin those practices. In line with the constructivist and discursive stance taken in this study, the data show that the LSTs appeared to embrace both these positions quite comfortably - they constructed multiple identities for themselves; they inhabited and borrowed from numerous discourses. This is not surprising. Neither should it be construed as some sort of flaw in the LSTs' accounts of their teaching or in the outcome of this study. It merely reflects the complexity of both the LSTs' positions and the nature of the reading process. This is one of the great strengths and values of the life-history methodology. Holly and Mac Lure (1990, p. 204) argue for the

inevitability of messiness, complexity and discomfoting discrepancies in the selves portrayed in educational biography. (They claim that) this is to be accepted, not 'corrected'.

The Contribution of a Life-history Analysis of the Lives of LSTs to the Development of Life-history Approaches to the Study of Teachers' Work and Identity in General.

The case for the study of teachers' lives as a window onto the work in schools and education in general has already been well made (Ball and Goodson, 1985; Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996; Huberman and Guskey, 1995; Day et al, 1993; Tuohy, 1999). This study however, used a life-history approach to investigate a distinctive subgroup of teachers – LSTs. While the LSTs in this study appeared to share much in common with their mainstream class-teacher colleagues, they did perceive themselves and believed others perceived them to be different from the main body of teachers in general. One of the distinctive ways they seemed to perceive and experience the discourse of LS teaching was as being different and marginalised, yet special and specialised. It is the lot of minority discourses to have to struggle to be heard because it is by maintaining the minority status of such discourse communities that the majority discourses survive and remain dominant.

Some educational research deliberately sets out to ensure that the voices of minorities and subgroups are heard (Clough and Barton, 1998; Mac an Ghaill, 1991). As the discussion on ethical issues in chapter two pointed out, this study can not, and does not, claim to be emancipatory in the sense of being deliberate advocacy research. However, one of the purposes of this study was to acknowledge the importance of the LSTs' perceptions, beliefs and values in their work as LSTs. Throughout their accounts many of them expressed appreciation of being given a 'voice' in the interview process and said they would like their 'voices' to be heard amongst their mainstream class-teacher colleagues. The life-history interview and the subsequent dissemination of life-history stories are ideal vehicles for transmitting the views and experiences of subgroups such as LSTs. While all teachers share various discourses of teaching in common, only LSTs have direct experience of the discourse of LSTs. Unless they are given a forum those with experience of LS teaching will not be heard. In such an eventuality, the exclusionary and marginalised label already carried by LSTs and their

pupils will not only stay in place, but will continue to harden as its ideological underpinnings remain unquestioned and unchallenged. The evidence from this study suggests that the LSTs themselves are unaware of, or at least de-sensitised to, the seemingly neutral but powerful ways in which they and their pupils are marginalised and kept in a subordinate position. Discourse analysis of LSTs' life-histories can help uncover the ideological workings of this power. It is important that the life-histories of LSTs are added to the growing body of literature on life-histories of teachers in general.

The life-history accounts retold in this study show that the LSTs had a lot of experience of teaching and schools. Like all teachers, they were pupils once and experienced a variety of teachers; like many teachers, they were all parents of pupils in schools. Unlike other teachers they had all previously been class-teachers and were now LSTs. Throughout their life-history interviews, they drew on all these experiences to represent themselves and their work. The different voices they adopted from different discourses yielded insights into their constructions of teaching and learning. They defined themselves as different, as teacher-parents, as knowers of their craft and as specialised teachers of reading. Their stories of their experiences and expertise are an important contribution to research on teachers and teaching. Life-history analyses allow for sustained interaction between researchers and practising teachers in a reciprocal and mutually respectful manner often denied by more quantitative research methodologies. Education in general could learn much from this category of teachers – LSTs. Extolling the value of autobiographical research, Clements (1999, p. 21) argues that such research

goes beyond the valuable work already done on teachers'
lives by embracing personal critique.

While life-history interviews are biographical rather than autobiographical, they do emphasise personal reflection and critique. Indeed the emphasis on joint construction in the life-history interview could be viewed as a preliminary step towards self-critiquing and autobiographical enquiry for all teachers. The call for professional reflection amongst teachers is not new (Dewey, 1933; Stenhouse, 1975). The LSTs in this study demonstrated by

their accounts of their beliefs and practices, that they engaged in such reflection. The life-history interview is a most appropriate method of allowing researchers and teachers combine their reflections on theory and practice. It is time life-history analysis became a regular feature on programmes of inservice and professional development for all teachers.

The implications of the current study extend to theoretical, methodological and professional issues for education generally and for the provision of inservice and professional development programmes for LSTs in particular. Because of their professional significance these implications and contributions are not synthesised in the summary of the findings in the present chapter. Instead they are awarded more detailed consideration by outlining them in the final chapter.

Chapter Eight

Evaluation

While I was satisfied overall with the way the study evolved and with the finished product, by far the most beneficial aspect of the whole process was the way I myself developed as a student/researcher. In retrospect, there are aspects I would change and further areas and questions I would explore if I were to start this study all over again. However, I now feel competent to carry out a similar research project in the future. This chapter acknowledges the limitations to the claims and generalisations that can be inferred from the study. It critiques the research tools used and identifies opportunities that might be more fruitfully explored in the future. Finally I evaluate the research process by tracing my growth as a student/researcher, giving a reflexive account of my role as researcher.

I wish to acknowledge the fact that the study was limited to a small sample of only ten LSTs. Consequently there are limitations to the claims and generalisations that can be made. Although the findings outlined in the previous four chapters reflect themes in the literature and in my current and previous professional experience, it is entirely possible that different themes could have emerged had I interviewed more, or different, LSTs. While it is not possible to generalise from the limited sample to the whole population of LSTs, it is reasonable to draw out some practical implications from the study for educational practice in general and for LS teaching in particular. These implications and corresponding recommendations are discussed in the final chapter.

It is not the purpose of life-history research to identify universal processes or generalisations. In their analysis of what distinguishes life-history from other types of qualitative research, Hatch and Wisniewski (1995, pp. 116-118) argue that life-history approaches deliberately focus on the individual and engage in an intensely personal type of research process. The life-history accounts reported in this study are highly subjective versions of what it means to be a LST. I am conscious that multiple readings and

interpretations could be made of the same accounts. Far from attempting to generalise from the findings or to discover some 'truth' or 'definitive' answers, my intention has been to produce a 'reading' of these ten LSTs' presentation of themselves and their work.

The main research tool was the life-history interview. This proved to be a suitable and successful instrument for the purpose of the study, which was to investigate LSTs' representation of how they construct and define their identity and their work as LSTs. The multi-layered approach to analysis, most particularly discourse analysis, facilitated an investigation into how the LSTs used language and various other resources from different discourses to represent themselves and their work. The life-history interview process provided an appropriate framework for addressing the key research question posed at the outset of the study – "what does it mean to be a LST?" The time-gap between each interview facilitated progressive focussing, allowing time to search the literature, read and reflect on the data as it emerged. Possible areas of interest and emerging themes were followed up in subsequent interviews. However, despite these positive aspects of the study, in hindsight I can now identify some opportunities that would have been worth developing.

I think the study would have been enhanced if I could have re-visited some of the LSTs and re-interviewed them. This would have allowed time and distance for all of us to reflect and possibly develop various issues and ideas further. Conscious that all research, but perhaps more particularly life-history research, is a social reconstruction, I think the study would have benefited from what Huberman (1993a, p. 36) calls "sustained interactivity" between the LSTs and myself throughout the entire project. As well as facilitating the successive accumulation of accounts over a period of time, this may have led to an even more collaborative type of reconstruction than that which occurred. Although I checked with each LST at the end of every interview that they were satisfied with what they had revealed and that they had no more to add, I did not engage in any formal respondent validation. I had subsequent informal discussions and telephone calls with some of them but they did not see my emerging or final analysis of their transcripts. They

were therefore denied the opportunity of commenting on, developing or altering my interpretation of their accounts. Accordingly I accept full responsibility for the final product. As Coffey (1999, p. 160) says we need to be aware that we are engaged in authorship and “are responsible for the reconstruction and telling of the field”. Acknowledging this I would still like to engage in a more participatory type of process in the future where the research would have a greater possibility of being conducted ‘with’ rather than ‘on’ the participants.

In retrospect, I now believe that further use might have been made of the four discussions with the groups of LSTs attending inservice courses for LSTs. Time constraints, as well the decision to use the life-history interview as the major research instrument, meant that it was not possible to exploit these discussions more fully. However, these discussions highlighted for me the possibilities offered by group biography and interviews for enriching the outcomes of future studies. While a group approach lacks the intimacy of the one-to-one interview, there is a valuable richness and breadth in the group. Group interviews might potentially offer the more collaborative and participatory type of research that I seek in the future. As a result of this study I am interested in further developing my research skills by engaging in biographical and autobiographical work with groups of teachers. The practical implementation of this type of work is briefly considered in the discussion on the professional implications of the study in the next chapter.

The study highlighted questions and areas of research which could not be addressed in the current project but which warrant further investigation. These arise from two sources – firstly, from unexplored and unanalysed data collected during the current study and secondly, to extend the major themes discussed in the study. Because the LSTs in the current study had so much to say about their class-teacher colleagues and what they believed their perceptions of LS teaching were, it would be interesting to investigate class-teachers’ views on LS teaching. The LSTs’ accounts in this study demonstrated that they perceived themselves, and believed others perceived them to be, ‘different’. To obtain a fuller picture of LS teaching, it would

be useful to study LS teaching from the perspective of those who most come into contact with the LST. This would entail investigating the pupils', parents', class-teachers' and principals' perspectives on and perceptions of LS teaching. Biographical research methods, perhaps, incorporating aspects of the group work discussed above, would be most appropriate for such work.

It would also be worthwhile incorporating a longitudinal dimension in a future study, whereby some of the LSTs from the current study could be re-interviewed in a few years time after they return to class-teaching. It would be interesting to see whether or not the themes of 'difference' and 'others' perceptions' were still relevant to them once they could look back on their days as LSTs from their current perspective as class-teacher.

In justifying the use of life-history approaches for studying LSTs in chapter two, I suggested that LSTs were in a pivotal position within the Irish educational system to influence the current developments in special education. Although it was not in the remit of this study to investigate such issues, the 'difference' theme, with its exclusionary undertones, does not bode well for the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the mainstream school. Future studies could build on the current one by researching the LSTs' role in including such pupils within the mainstream system.

Analysis of the data reveals that the LSTs' experience of parenthood played a significant part in the construction of their professional identity. It would be an interesting point of comparison to build on this work to see if and how mainstream class-teachers make reference to their identity as parents. Gender, social and political issues such as motherhood, fatherhood, teaching and the ideologies underpinning such concepts could be explored. Notions which merit further examination include – the identification of teaching with parenthood, the commonsense notion that teaching is a glorified 'baby-sitting service' and that teachers who are not parents, in some way, lack attributes essential to being a 'good' teacher.

It is appropriate that in a study which examines identity, I should also reflexively look at my own identity for as Erben (1996, p. 160) says

the biographical method has an intra-reflexive aspect and
(that) researchers should be aware of the normative facet
of their own cultural position.

Engaging in this research developed, shaped and made me aware of the many different identities I inhabited and of the various social, cultural and intellectual frameworks I brought to the work. I am, amongst other things, a former LST who has much in common with the LSTs in the project; I am now an Ed.D. student conscious of the examination process striving to produce a study of high quality and integrity. Factors such as my training and experience as a LST, my familiarity with the in-service provision for LSTs in Ireland, my experience of parenthood, my ideological assumptions as well as the many other influences of which I am not even aware, all contributed to the story that is told in this study. Exploring how fieldwork affects the researcher and how the researcher affects the field, Coffey (1999, p. 139) claims that

What we do with our data in terms of reading, rereading
and sense-making is definitely an emotional activity and
one where the ethnographer-self is central.

Throughout the course of the research, I swung from excitement at the emergence of thematic patterns to paralysis and worry over the responsibility of deciding what was significant and whether or not I was being faithful to the data throughout. Over all this roller-coaster of emotions lay the fear that the study was in danger of becoming so introspective and self-referential that at times I worried that it was becoming more concerned with methodology than with using the data as a source of answers to the research questions.

However, eventually I realised that confusion and lack of coherence were just as much part of my growth as they are part of the postmodern condition. Usher (1998, p. 19) reminds us that the “real me” can never be made transparent. The story of what it means to be a LST as narrated in this study is not a presentation of LSTs’ work and lives. It is my reconstruction of our joint construction of what it means to be a LST in a primary school in the

east-coast of Ireland. Just as it is not possible to represent a person as he or she “really” is, so too it is impossible to distinguish between the biographer and the subjects of the biography. As Scott (1998, pp. 43, 44) says

The interpretative process involves an interweaving of two agendas: those of the person and their biographer.

The account of the ten LSTs given here is not generalisable to all LSTs in Ireland or anywhere else. It is one of many possible versions that could have been offered. It is, as Scott says, “a privileged reading” of lives.

My growth as a student-researcher can be traced mainly through the feedback on various progress reports I received from my tutor and through the research journal I kept throughout the process. Examining both of these sources now at the end of the study, I can identify critical learning stages during the study period. Key texts, for example, influenced my thinking and affected the course of the study. Having started out to investigate the pupils attending the LST, I was disappointed by the LSTs’ reluctance to be observed while teaching. I then turned my attention to the LSTs themselves and was profoundly moved by Nias’s longitudinal study of *Primary Teachers Talking* (1989). Reading them as a former teacher, the accounts of Nias’s teachers seemed so real they leaped off the page at me. Subsequent literature on teachers’ lives and work that quoted teachers’ words, had such a ring of truth about them that I wanted to investigate LS teaching from the perspective of the LST. When I read *I Answer with my Life* three years later I identified with Casey’s (1993, p.10) excitement at reading actual quotations from women teachers, which informed her decision to engage in oral-history research. According to Lather, cited in Bowl’s (1999, p. 567) review of Erben’s book, *Biography in Education*,

The validity of research of this nature lies in its power to produce a click of recognition in the reader.

These texts, with direct quotations from teachers, certainly produced that click of recognition in me. Because I work professionally with practising teachers, it seemed all the more appropriate to study those very teachers using a methodology that would tap into their perspectives on their teaching.

My research diary records a number of other books and articles that influenced the course of the work and I give just one example of this with regard to the theme of 'parenthood'. Initially I was surprised at the emergence of such a theme as I had not previously encountered it in the literature. Believing it to be a neglected area of research, I then became excited as each new LST continued to talk of their experiences of parenthood and I found fleeting references in authors such as Kelchtermans, 1993; Pajak and Blasé, 1989 and Nias, 1989. Naively, or perhaps brashly, thinking that I had stumbled on some original insight, I was then somewhat taken aback and disappointed when I first came upon Sikes's book *Parents who Teach: Stories from Home and from School*, (1997) in which she outlines many of the same themes and ideas of parenthood offered by my LSTs. However, on studying her book and some of the related references I now appreciate the confirmation and insights offered by her accounts. As Hargreaves says in the introduction to Sikes's book (1997, p. XIII), she shows how

parenting in many cases is a valid form of teacher
development in itself.

Learning to appreciate that someone else has already articulated your wonderful ideas is a valid form of researcher development in itself.

Factors other than the literature also impacted on my development. With the help of my tutor, my knowledge and understanding of the importance of discourse grew as the study progressed. Initially I tended to treat the LSTs' accounts as fairly transparent and unproblematical representations of their experiences, thoughts, beliefs and values. Constant re-reading of the data led me to ground the analysis in the language used by the LSTs. As I learned more about the relationship between discourse and identity, I developed a new appreciation of how discourse analysis could actually facilitate the study of teachers' lives and identity. I began to unpack the terminology that the LSTs used within the discourse of LS teaching to see what ideological assumptions underpinned that terminology. As patterns and themes emerged and recurred, I began to see associations between language use and certain patterns in professional identity. There was a reciprocal relationship between the emergence of the themes and my

reading of the literature. As I unearthed a theme, I consulted the literature, which helped me make more sense of the data. The more I read, the more I was affirmed in the themes I distilled from the data.

As a research instrument, this reflexive approach was very important for me as researcher. My awareness of the constructionist and collaborative nature of the interview process grew. I could see how the LSTs constantly negotiated and renegotiated their identity as they borrowed from different discourse communities, just as I did, throughout the research period. I became very aware of my own position in the interview process and of my interpretation and construction of their accounts. The research diary acted as a type of sounding board which helped me to reflect as my thinking evolved. I moved from a simplistic certainty about LSTs and their practices to an awareness of the provisional and multi-faceted nature of the whole process.

The LSTs were very appreciative of the opportunity to talk about themselves and their work. Many of them said the interview was a new experience for them and they really enjoyed it. I was surprised at the strength of the bond created between the LSTs and myself as a result of the interviews. I was also honoured and humbled to be given such privileged and generous access to their lives, experiences, thoughts and beliefs. The findings addressed the research questions posed at the beginning of the study and the life-history approach yielded a picture of what it means to be a LST. I have learned so much by going through the process I now feel confident and eager to conduct a life-history or similar type of qualitative research study again.

Chapter Nine

Implications, Recommendations and Conclusions

The biographical work on teachers' lives has ignored the study of LSTs. It is time this neglect was redressed. Because of the recent substantial investment and interest in the Irish LS service, this is especially pertinent for Irish education at the present time. The findings of this study have professional and academic implications for both the provision of LS and for education generally in Ireland. This chapter discusses these implications. It is now widely recognised that the teacher is pivotal in affecting change and improvement in schools (Day et al, 1993; Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996; Hargreaves, 1997; Mitchell and Weber, 1999). Unless LSTs are given a forum to explore and share the assumptions, values, beliefs and ideas that underpin the work they do, the educational world, and indeed the general public, will never know what LSTs do. Furthermore, the assumptions underlying their practices will never be questioned or critically examined. Although there are limits to the claims that can be made from a study of this size, the findings offer the possibility of opening up a debate about the discourse of LS teaching.

The narrative accounts in this study show that the LSTs engaged seriously in the biographical process and that they used the opportunity to present their constructions of themselves as LSTs. As they remembered, negotiated, created and represented their identities and their work, they reflected on their theories and practices of teaching. Biographical research methods, such as the life-history approach adopted in this study, could be offered to teachers taking in-service courses as a way of helping them bring to the fore their attitudes and beliefs about such topics as the teaching of reading as well as their constructions of teaching and learning in general. This study, however, does not simply present life-history stories as raw, free-standing data. Instead the application of discourse analysis adds a further critical dimension to the methodology. Thus, the study represents an attempt to bring together life-history (albeit of ten LSTs) and discourse analysis within an integrated methodology. This drawing together makes a worthwhile

contribution to educational research methodology. Such an approach can be extended to assess changes in teacher attitudes and beliefs over time. This would be especially useful for subgroups of teachers, such as LSTs, as there is so little qualitative research available on these groups in Ireland. This study highlights the way in which biographical research coupled with discourse analysis can inform the discourse of LS teaching and offer important insights into critical areas of education such as language and literacy. Using discourse analysis and drawing on what Erben (1998, p.1) calls the “narrative features of human identity”, research tools such as reflective journals, autobiographies, memory work and group biographies, have much to offer the continuing professional development of teachers.

One of the most serious implications of this study for the educational system in general and for the special educational system in particular, is the question mark it places over the concept of LS. The recurring theme of ‘difference’ which permeated the data is an issue which deserves serious consideration. If, as their accounts suggest, the discourse of LS teaching pushes LSTs and their pupils into marginalised and isolated positions, it is important that this discourse be scrutinised so that the exclusionary assumptions underpinning it are exposed. By defining LSTs, LS pupils and LS programmes in relation to the people and work of the mainstream classroom, the concept of LS is cast in the role of being marginal to and deviant from the mainstream. By excluding those who are involved in LS from the mainstream classroom, the privileged status of the mainstream classroom is maintained and strengthened. The mainstream classroom is excused from catering for all pupils and from offering programmes suitable for the diversity of literacy practices engaged in by those pupils.

Ideally, the concept and position of LS needs to be abandoned because, as long as it exists, so too will the notion of excluding those who avail of it and privileging those who do not. This is not simply a matter for LSTs or those studying to become LSTs. If any change in attitude is to occur, in-service providers need to address the whole teaching body. As Ireland changes from being relatively mono-cultural by tradition, to welcoming a wide and differing variety of people from around the globe, it is important to examine

critically the messages portrayed by the specialised terminology used in educational discourses. As Stierer and Bloome, (1994, p. 12) point out there is a

need to sensitise colleagues involved in teacher education
to the power of discourse.

The discourse used by teacher educators inducts teachers into particular values and assumptions by appealing to the commonsense quality of that discourse. Critical discourse analysis needs to permeate all areas of study, as well as being a topic in its own right, on professional development courses for teachers (Fairclough, 1989; 1995; Ivanic, 1998). It is hoped that this study will encourage discussion on the implications of the terminology used about and within the profession of teaching in general and LS teaching in particular.

The accounts in this study highlight what the LSTs perceived as a lack of awareness and understanding of the role and work of the LST on the part of their mainstream class-teacher colleagues. However, they also stressed the need for co-operation between both groups of teachers. While it is not possible to generalise from the accounts of just ten LSTs, the findings do point to some practical steps that could be taken towards bridging the gap that appears to lie between LS and class-teachers, if and wherever such a gap exists. Apart from the obvious benefits to their pupils, both LS and class-teachers would have much to gain from a closer relationship. The LSTs described their loneliness and isolation on one hand and their fear of becoming insulated and cut off from the work of the mainstream school on the other. They also identified themselves as 'expert' teachers with specialised knowledge, skills and ways of working that could be of real benefit to the class-teacher. Class-teachers, on the other hand, work all day with the pupils who avail of the LS service. This must place them in a very strong position to inform the LSTs regarding pupils' abilities, learning needs and progress. The accounts show that the LSTs were interested in the whole child, not just their difficulties in learning to read. They would have much to learn in this regard from the child's class-teacher. A closer relationship between LSTs and their mainstream class-teacher colleagues might help dispel some of the mystique that appears to surround the area of LS and

special education and might reveal that the apparent gap between the two groups of teachers may not actually be that wide. After all, LSTs were class-teachers for a long time. The implications for both teacher groups, and for in-service providers in particular, are clear - as long as in-service on LS is provided exclusively for LSTs, the sort of isolation and misunderstanding, described by the LSTs in this study, will continue. In-service on LS needs to be directed at mainstream class-teachers just as much as at LSTs.

The LSTs' accounts of their practices regarding the teaching of reading raise important professional and theoretical issues relating to the teaching of reading in general. While the data were drawn from a study of only ten LSTs and cannot suggest definitive lessons for professional practice generalisable across the whole LS teaching population, the findings do at least raise some questions about the cognitive skills-based approach to the teaching of reading which seemed to dominate the LSTs' accounts of their practice. This approach has serious implications for the teaching of reading, particularly for those children who do not have access to, or whose culture does not value, the literacy practices of the dominant and powerful groups in society. None of the LSTs appeared to view reading or any aspect of literacy as social processes. Rather literacy was regarded as a universally-accepted body of cognitive skills, which could be transmitted and mastered. It is not surprising that the LSTs hold this view of literacy because it is the view into which they are inducted during their pre-service and in-service education as teachers and LSTs. Future teacher pre-service and in-service programmes of professional development will need to redress this imbalance, indeed this neglect, in their courses. Attention needs to be drawn to the diversity of literacies (Heath, 1991; 1994; Gee, 1999; 2000). Literacy needs to be presented as a set of socially constructed practices, which are influenced by historical and present contexts, cultural values and the uses to which people put them (Ivanic, 1998; Kress, 1997; Street, 1984; 1994).

The competing discourses on the teaching of reading need to be scrutinised so that their underlying practices, values and ideologies can be brought to

the fore and unpacked (Shannon, 2000; Hall, 1998; Auerbach, 1992). The onus is on in-service providers to help LS and class-teachers explore their beliefs and attitudes regarding the teaching of reading as well as the ideological assumptions underpinning their teaching practices. According to Westwood et al

Literacy teaching practices are unlikely to change as a result of training and development programmes unless teachers' basic beliefs and attitudes concerning children's early literacy learning are also changed. (1997, pp. 231).

The data show that while the LSTs appeared to believe in and aspire to a liberal, humanist, process approach to literacy, their practice of literacy teaching was instrumentalist and skills-based. By challenging them to examine their practices, LSTs may gain the confidence they appear currently to lack to match their teaching more closely to their beliefs.

In his large-scale study of 160 teachers' lives, Huberman and his researchers (1993b, p. 262) were struck by the level of "unconsciousness" on the part of many of the teachers who made statements like "I've never thought about those things before". Although only ten LSTs were interviewed for this study, it is interesting to note that unlike Huberman's teachers, the accounts of the LSTs in this study revealed that they engaged in serious reflection on their work and lives. As the discussion on their craft knowledge in chapter four shows, they often declared themselves to be intolerant of theory while at the same time they showed evidence of theorising and reflecting in their accounts of their practice. Their accounts show that they had an intuitive, holistic approach to theory and practice which was borne out in their craft knowledge in practice. However, they appeared to lack a suitable vocabulary and discourse to articulate their particular type of theory-building - that is, their craft knowledge. In the absence of a specialised discourse, they used images and analogies to present their craft knowledge. Calderhead (1993, p. 12) claims that although teacher educators "have an intuitive understanding of good practice" they have no means of describing or defending it. The providers of in-service education for teachers need to engage with teachers so that together they can investigate the roots, nature and characteristics of teachers' craft knowledge. They could then work on

creating a language and framework for acknowledging, describing and developing teachers' craft knowledge. This sort of work offers promising possibilities for collaborative research between practising teachers, teacher educators and educational researchers as well as for the teacher-as-researcher movement and classroom-based research.

The LSTs in this study are not just ordinary people or even ordinary teachers. They are a distinctive group within the general body of teachers who have not yet been studied using biographical methods. Their accounts show that they are dealing with a wide and varied range of complex issues. I have tried to give a flavour of some of these complexities by highlighting such issues as the exclusionary connotations that appear to accompany the concept of LS teaching and the highly contested nature of literacy and of the teaching of reading. The LSTs' accounts are themselves contextualised in the multi-layered context of the institution of schools, history, tradition, the policies and ideological assumptions surrounding special education and learning support and of course the social phenomenon of the life-history interview itself. Acknowledging that the LSTs are all individuals occupying a range of subject positions, this study provides a picture of the professional identity of LSTs, based on the language they used to account for themselves and their work, rather than individual identities of each of the ten narrators. As Casey (1990, p. 303) stresses

.....the idea of 'discourse' supposes that there are distinguishable (although constantly changing) patterns of understanding among members of a particular social group.

Life-history was the approach that facilitated the emergence of this picture and uncovered some of those distinguishable patterns. I believe this project has demonstrated the importance of sustained study of LSTs using life-history methodologies.

Appendix A

Semi Structured Interview Schedule for the Pilot Study

How did you become a teacher and then a LST?

- teaching experience, class teacher, LST

Why did you decide to go into LS teaching?

Relationship between professional and personal life

- is there a separation between your professional and personal life?

Your work as a teacher

- what do you do, now, before, anything different?
- your typical day, today?

How do you teach language and literacy?

- reading, writing, oral language, spelling, mathematics?
- approaches, general philosophy
- books, materials?
- the content of your work

Approaches to children who are failing

- attending LST
- how and who selects the children for the LS tuition
- how long do they attend the LST
- what do you do with them

Your concerns

- re children
- re other teachers
- principals
- Department of Education inspectors?

What are the complexities of LS teaching?

- what is difficult?
- why?

Satisfaction / dissatisfaction

Motivation

Professional development

- training, initial, postgraduate, inservice
- did you feel equipped for the job, then now?
- reading, writing., professional associations?

Career development

- as teacher, LST?

Do you feel supported in your work as a LST?

Aims of LS education

- in general, in Ireland, in your school, in your own classroom
- for your children, what benefit do they get from LS tuition

Appendix B

Moderately-Structured Interview Schedule

How did you become a teacher and then a LST?

Route

Who / what influenced you

Any critical events instances people

Who are your role models?

personal eg. parents teachers, entry requirements for college

college, study, further study

teaching experience, class teacher, LST

Why did you decide to go into LS teaching?

Reflections on experience of teaching

personal, self, life, relationships, social life

do you socialise with teachers from school

professional experiences, how you teach, did teach, big

educational issues

children, children with SEN, schools

Relationship between professional and personal life

Is there a separation between your professional and personal life

(you as teacher and you as a person)

What impact does your life outside school have on your teaching

What is your identity – how do you see yourself – what

mental image do you have of yourself

metaphor for teaching? eg. gardener / farmer / hairdresser

teacher as-?

has this image / metaphor changed over time?

Your work as a teacher NB note terminology carefully

what constitutes your work?

what do you do, now, before, anything different?

your typical day, today?

what counts as work?

Could you describe your approach in detail – take an

example of a specific child or group

Recall an actual activity/specific plan/ particular material

Could you paint a picture for me of what you do / did in a

session last week / pick one child or one group

Can you think of some lesson / incident / teaching point /

interaction with a child / some teaching or learning process

that went very well (or very badly) What did / do you think

of it now? Why?

How do you teach language and literacy?

If you can, can you try to treat me as a non-teacher in the way that you answer, because I am interested in the way you explain the terms you're using to non-professionals.
 reading, writing, oral language, spelling, mathematics?
 approaches, general philosophy
 books, materials?
 the content of your work
 The uses of literacy – what is literacy / reading / writing used for in your classroom; in your teaching?
 What counts as reading for your? How do you know you are teaching reading properly? That the children are learning reading? What is important for you to teach them with regard to literacy? How do you work this out? How did you arrive at these decisions —ie. to teach certain things in a certain way?

What counts as literacy for you? What does it mean to be literate? What is important for your children to know / learn (literacy) before they leave school; leave you?

Approaches to children who are failing

attending LST
 how and who selects the children for the LS tuition
 how long do they attend the LST
 what do you do with them

Your role

How would you define your role?
 How do you define the role of the LST?
 How do others define your role? – children, parents, other teachers, principal, inspectors?
 Your perception of their perceptions
 Any confusion over role?

Your concerns

re children
 re other teachers
 principals
 Department of Education inspectors?

What are the complexities of LS teaching?

What is difficult
 Why
 In what contexts is it difficult – give example

Your constructions of teaching and learning

How do children learn? How do you believe they learn?
 What guides your teaching? Do you think about the reasons for teaching in a certain way or for teaching certain thing?
 Do you think about how you teach and how children learn?

When . where / what do you think about? What guides your thinking about teaching and learning? How do you learn? Do you think about your own learning or how you learn?

Satisfaction / dissatisfaction
with what, who?

Motivation
How / what / who motivates you
What would make you give up
Where is the pay back – what is in it for you

Professional development
training, initial, postgraduate, inservice
did you feel equipped for the job, then now?
reading, writing., professional associations?

Career development
as teacher, LST?
changed over the years?
Is there a time when you can look back and say “that was the high point of my teaching career?” or “I really got through to that child / I was very good at that particular time”? Or is there an actual incident you can remember good / bad?
Can you retell your best teaching moments?
What are the positive aspects of your work?
future plans, hopes, have you a longer / short-term plan
where do you see yourself in ten years time
personal, place of work in your personal life?
Professional
Do you link your continuing professional development to your role / identity as a LST
Are you committed to LS teaching – vocational / professional / career-continuance

Do you feel supported in your work as a LST?
By colleagues, principal, teachers
Who do you talk to in school – re daily issues / big educational issues
parents
children – do you need to have a personal relationship with the children
do you seek support from other LSTs – where – do you get it

Aims of LS education
in general, in Ireland, in your school, in your own classroom
for your children, what benefit do they get from LS tuition

Big overriding questions
Contrast between class and LS teaching?
Effect of being a parent?

how does being a LST, taking part in all the things a LST
does, construct your identity as a person?
what does it mean to be a LST?
what is involved in being a LST?
how does being a LST relate to being a teacher?
is there a difference, if so what/how/why?
how does being a LST relate to being a person?
what makes a LST, a good one?

Appendix C

Introductory questionnaire for LSTs participating in the study

Name (confidential):-----

Age:-----

Present school (confidential):-----

Other schools where you have taught and for how long:-----

Number of years in present school:-----

Number of years teaching:-----

Number of years teaching as a LST:-----

Teaching experience (which classes):-----

Any breaks in teaching service:-----

Qualifications:-----

Course(s) and college(s) attended-----

Completion of LS course, where and when:-----

Caseload as a Remedial Teacher:-----

Number of children attending your classes:-----

Number of children in whole school:-----

Number of teachers in whole school:-----

Support services in the school for children with special needs:-----

Which classes attend the LST (Jun. Inf. – 6th):-----

How often do the children attend:-----

Duration of the lesson:-----

Size of groupings:-----

Criteria for selection of children:-----

Duration of children's attendance:-----

Criteria for discontinuing attendance:-----

Appendix D

Coding the Data (An example of an early attempt to categorise themes while reading through the data in the initial stages.)

theme	Vera	Paula	Emily	Matt	Ciara	Tony	Colm	Sarah	Jim	Fred
Parent-hood	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Self-esteem	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Different; apart; cut off	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Illiteracy	✓	x	x	✓	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓
Weak children	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Loyalty of children	x	/	✓	/	/	/	x	x	x	x
No time	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pressure to succeed	✓	✓	✓	/	✓	x	/	✓	✓	/
Waves of children	/	✓	x	/	/	/	✓	✓	/	x
Loneliness	/	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	/	x

✓ = mentioned a lot, major theme

x = not mentioned

/ = mentioned but slightly different slant / emphasis

Appendix E

Jim's story about illiteracy

"I feel I do motivate them. There's one story that I use again and again. This past-pupil left sixth class and he couldn't read anything and he was working on a building site and the guys were passing a joke from the paper that they cut out and he pretended he could read it and he started to laugh – you know and em – and then one of them copped on that he couldn't read and put him on the spot and asked him what the joke was about and everyone was staring at him and that guy, I said, you'd want to see the size of him – the muscles on him – eighteen stone – and so on – he's a rock – he justThat night he cried for hours.

.....and I tell them another one about this guy who came back from secondary school to me and said - "tell all the kids up there, will you, that they must learn to read 'cos there's nothing worse than girls laughing at you if you can't read".

Maybe its slightly illegal or not politically correct, but I mean.....The positive way to do it of course would be to read books and stories that they could enjoy.....but the threat part....I don't feel comfortable doing it but it does sneak out in frustration. (*Jim*)

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